SPURGEON COMMENTARY SERIES

Commentary on The New Testament

CHARLES SPURGEON

COMMENTARY ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

Charles Spurgeon

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MATTHEW

Matthew 1

1. *The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.*

This verse gives us a clue to the special drift of Matthew's gospel. He was moved of the Holy Spirit to write of our Lord Jesus Christ as king — "the son of David." He is to be spoken of as specially reigning over the true seed of Abraham; hence he is called "the son of Abraham." Lord Jesus, make us each one to call thee, "My God and King!" As we read this wonderful gospel of the kingdom may we be full of loyal obedience, and pay thee humble homage! Thou art both a King and a king's Son.

The portion before us looks like a string of names, and we might fancy that it would yield us little spiritual food; but we may not think lightly of any line of the inspired volume. Here the Spirit sets before us the pedigree of Jesus, and sketches the family tree of "the King of the Jews." Marvelous condescension, that he should be a man, and have a genealogy, even he who "was in the beginning with God", and "thought it not robbery to be equal with God"! Let us read each line of "The book of the generation" with adoring gratitude that we have a King who is one with us in our nature: "in ties of blood with sinners one."

2. *Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren.*

With Abraham was the covenant made, that in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed. The line ran not in Ishmael, the offspring of the flesh, but in Isaac, who was born after the promise; and by the divine purpose it flowed in elect Jacob, and not in the firstborn, Esau. Let us observe and admire the sovereignty of God. Our Lord sprang out of Judah, of which tribe nothing is said concerning the priesthood, that it might be clear that his priesthood is "not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life." Yet comes he of Judah's royal tribe; for he is King.

3, 4. *And Judas begat Phares and Ezra of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; and Aram, begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naamon; and Naamon begat Salmon.*

Observe the dash of unclean blood which enters the stream through Judah's incest with Thamar. O Lord, thou art the sinner's Friend!

5. *And Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse.*

We note that two women are mentioned in this fifth verse: a Canaanite and a Moabitess. Thus Gentile blood mingled with the Hebrew strain. Our King has come to break down the partition wall. As Gentiles we rejoice in this. Jesus is heir of a line in which flows the blood of the harlot Rahab, and of the rustic Ruth; he is akin to the fallen and to the lowly, and he will show his love even to the poorest and most obscure. I, too, may have part and lot in him.

6-9. *And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; and Solomon. begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; and Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; and Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias.*

Well may our hearts melt at the memory of David and Bathsheba! The fruit of their unholy union died; but, after repentance, she who "had been the wife of

Uria" became the wife of David, and the mother of Solomon.

Signal was the grace of God in this case, that the line should be continued in this once guilty pair; but, oh, what kinship with fallen humanity does this indicate in our Lord! We will not pry into the mystery of the incarnation, but we must wonder at the condescending grace which appointed our Lord such a pedigree.

10. *And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias.*

A line of kings of a mixed character; not one of them perfect, and some of them as bad as bad could be. Three are left out altogether: even sinners who were only fit to be forgotten were in the line of this succession; and this shows how little can be made of being born of the will of man, or of the will of the flesh. In this special line of descent, salvation was not of blood, nor of birth. Specially let us think of such a one as Manasses being among the ancestors of our Lord, as if to hint that, in the line which comes after him, there would be some of the chief of sinners who would be miracles of mercy. Again we say, how near does Jesus come to our fallen race by this his genealogy!

11. *And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon.*

Poor captives, and those who are bound with the fetters of sin, may see some like themselves in this famous ancestry. They are prisoners of hope, now that the Christ is born of a race which was once "carried away to Babylon."

12-16. *And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel; and Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Ablud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; and Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; and Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.*

With one or two exceptions these are names of persons of little or no note.

The later ones were persons altogether obscure and insignificant. Our Lord was “a root out of dry ground”; a shoot from the withered stem of Jesse. He set small store by earthly greatness. He must needs be of human race; but he comes to a family which was of low estate, and there finds his reputed father, Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth. He is the poor man’s King. He will not disdain any of us though our father’s house be little in Israel. He will condescend to men of low estate.

Wonder surpassing all wonders; the Word by whom all things were made, was himself made flesh, and dwelt among us! He was born of a human mother, even of the lowly virgin, Mary. “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.” Our hearts would anoint with sweet perfume of love and praise the blessed head of him “who is called Christ”, the Anointed One.

17. *So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.*

The Holy Ghost led his servant Matthew to adopt a rough and simple method to help weak memories. Here are three fourteens. Let us learn from this to make ourselves familiar with our Lord’s pedigree, and think much of his being born into the world. Specially let us see that he was literally of the house of David, and the seed of Abraham; for many prophecies in the Old Testament pointed to this fact. He is truly the Messiah, the Prince, which was to come.

18. *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.*

A word or two sufficed to describe the birth of all the kings whose names we have read; but for our Lord Jesus Christ there is much more to be said. The evangelist girds himself up for his solemn duty, and writes: — “Now the birth of

Jesus Christ was on this wise." It is a deep, mysterious, and delicate subject, fitter for reverent faith than for speculative curiosity. The Holy (host wrought in the chosen virgin the body of our Lord. There was no other way of his being born; for had he been of a sinful father, how should he have possessed a sinless nature? He is born of a woman, that he might be human; but not by man, that he might not be sinful. See how the Holy Ghost co-operates in the work of our redemption by preparing the body of our Lord!

19. *Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily.*

Mary was espoused to him, and he was saddened and perplexed when he learned that she would become a mother before they had been actually married. Many would have thrust her away in indignation, and put her to an open shame; but Joseph was of royal mind as well as royal race. He would not expose what he thought to be the sin of his espoused wife: although he felt that she must be put away, he would do it quietly. When we have to do a severe thing, let us choose the tenderest manner. May be, we shall not have to do it at all.

20. *But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.*

He could not but feel very anxious, and no doubt he prayed about these things both day and night. God would not leave the honor of the chosen virgin-mother without protection. Soon Joseph had the best of guidance. From heaven he had the assurance that Mary had not sinned, but had been favored of the Lord. Joseph is reminded of his royal rank, "thou son of David", and is bidden to cast away his fear. How he must have been comforted by the Lord's "fear not"! He was to take Mary under his tender care, and be a foster-father to the son who would be born of her.

Mary must have been in great anxiety herself as to whether her story of angelic visitation would be believed; for it looked improbable enough. We doubt not that faith sustained her; but she needed much of it. Every great favor brings a great trial with it as its shadow, and becomes thus a new test of faith. The Lord very

graciously removed all suspicion from Joseph's mind, and thus provided for the honor of the mother, and for the comfort of the holy child. If Jesus is born in our hearts, we shall have trouble; but the Lord will witness that Christ is ours, and he will surely bear us through.

21. *And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*

The Lord of glory is born the Son of man, and is named by God's command, and by man's mouth, JESUS the Savior. He is what he is called. HE saves us from the punishment and the guilt of sin, -and then from the ill effect and evil power of sin. This he does for "his people", even for all who believe in him. It is his nature to do this, as we see in the fact that his very name is JESUS — Savior. We still call him by that name, for he still saves us in these latter days. Let us go and tell out his name among men; for he will save others.

22, 23. *Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name EMMANUEL, which being interpreted, God with us.*

Who would have thought that the prophecy contained in Isaiah 7:14 could have referred to our Lord? One of these days we shall discover a great deal more in the inspired Word than we can see today. Perhaps it is needful to our understanding a prophecy that we should see it actually fulfilled. What blind eyes we have!

It is pleasant to mark that, according to this verse, and the twenty-first, EMMANUEL and JESUS mean the same thing. "God with us" is our Savior. He is with us as God on purpose to save us. The incarnation of Jesus is our salvation.

To cheer Joseph, and decide his mind, Holy Scripture is brought to his remembrance; and truly, when are in a dilemma, nothing gives us such confidence in going forward as the sacred oracles impressed upon the heart. How conversant was Joseph with the prophets to have their words before him in a dream! Lord, whether I read thy Word when awake, or have it brought to my

memory in my sleep, it is always precious to me! But thou, Lord Jesus, God with us, art dearer still; and the written Word is chiefly precious because it speaks of thee, the incarnate Word.

24, 25. *Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took onto him a wife: and knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.*

Joseph was not disobedient to the heavenly vision in an, respect. He did not delay, but as soon as he rose he “did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him.” Without delay, demur, or reservation, he obeyed. What holy awe filled his heart as he welcomed the favored virgin to his home, to be respectfully and affectionately screened from all evil! What must he have thought when he saw the Son of the Highest lying on the bosom of her whom he had espoused! He was happy to render any service to the newborn King. Since he accepted Mary as his espoused wife, her child was the heir of Joseph, and so of David; and thus was by right the King of the Jews. Our Lord Jesus had a birthright by his mother; but his right on the father’s side was, by Joseph’s act and deed, also put beyond dispute.

Let us leave this wonderful passage worshipping the Son of God, who condescended to be born the Son of man. Thus our God became our brother, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. The nearer he comes to us, the more humbly let us adore him. The more true the kinship of our King, the more enthusiastically let us crown him Lord of all!

Matthew 2

1. *Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.*

The King is born, and now he must be acknowledged. At the same moment he will be assailed. His birth was in the days of another king, of Edomite stock, who had usurped the throne of David. The world's kingdom is opposed to that of our Lord: where Jesus is born there is sure to be a Herod in power. It is a marvelous thing that Magi from afar should know that a great king was born, and should come from so great a distance to do him homage; for the world's wise men are not often found bowing at the feet of Jesus. When wise men seek our King they are wise indeed. These were devout men, to whom the stars spoke of God. An unusual luminary was understood by them to indicate the birth of the Coming Man for whom many in all lands were looking. Stars might guide us if we were willing to be led. Lord Jesus, make everything speak to me concerning thee, and may I be truly led till I find thee!

The wise men were not content with having "seen his star", they must see himself; and, seeing, they must adore. These were not in doubt as to his Godhead: they said, "We are come to worship him." Lord, I pray thee, make all the wise men to worship thee!

3. *When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.*

Herod is expressly called "Herod the king": in that capacity he is the enemy of our King. They are in a sad state to whom the Savior is a trouble. Some, like

Herod, are troubled because they fear that they shall lose position and honor if true religion makes progress, and many have an undefined dread that the presence of Jesus will deprive them of pleasure, or call them to make unwilling sacrifices. O thou who art the King of heaven, thou cost not trouble me: thou art my joy!

See the influence of one man: Herod's trouble infects "all Jerusalem." Well it might; for this cruel prince delighted in shedding blood, and the darkness of his brow meant death to many. Unhappy Jerusalem, to be troubled by the birth of the Savior! Unhappy people, to whom true godliness is a weariness!

4. *And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.*

When the earth-king dabbles in theology, it bodes no good to truth Herod among priests and scribes in Herod still. Some men may, become well instructed in their Bibles, and yet be all the worse for what they have discovered. Like Herod, they make ill use of what they learn; or like these scribes, they may know much about the Lord Jesus, and yet have no heart towards him.

5, 6. *And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.*

They were right in their conclusion, though somewhat cloudy in their quotation. Jesus was to be born in the city of David, in Bethlehem, which is, being interpreted, "the house of bread." Though the city was but a little one, his birth therein made it famous: Jesus ennobles all that he touches. These scribes knew where to find the text about the Savior's birth, and they could put their finger upon the spot in the map where he should be born; and yet they knew not the King, neither cared to seek him out. May it never be my case, to be a master of Scriptural geography, prophecy, and theology, and yet to miss HIM of whom the Scripture speaks!

With joy would we note the name of Governor, here given to Jesus. We are of the spiritual Israel if he rules us. Oh, that the day may soon come when the literal

Israel shall behold the government laid upon his shoulder!

7. *Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.*

We delight in anxious inquirers; but here was one of a very evil sort. Many pry into holy things, that they may ridicule or otherwise oppose them. What an evil diligence is this! When very private inquiries are made, we may suspect that something is wrong; and yet it is not always so. However, truth fears not the light. Whether men inquire privily or not, we are ready to give them information about our Lord, and about everything which concerns him.

8. *And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.*

Artful wretch! Murder was in his heart, but pious pretenses were on his tongue. May none of us be Herodians in hypocrisy! To promise to worship and to intend to destroy, is a piece of trickery very usual in our own days.

Mark, that the wise men never promised to return to Herod: they probably guessed that all this eager zeal was not quite so pure as it seemed to be, and their silence did not mean consent. We must not believe everybody who makes loud professions, nor do all that they ask of us, lest we aid them in some evil design.

9, 10. *When they had heard the king they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*

Yes, “they departed”, and were wise to get out of Herod’s vile company. They made no compact with him; they heard his false professions, and they went their way. The star appeared when the tyrant disappeared.

The star was probably a meteor, or moving light, which having shone long enough in the western heavens to guide them to Judea, then ceased to be visible;

but shone forth again as they quitted Jerusalem. We must not always expect to have visible signs to cheer us, but we are very glad of them when the Lord grants them to us. We seek not the star of inward feelings, or outward signs, but Jesus himself; yet have we great joy when heavenly they comfort shines into our souls. Lord, show me a token for good: this will make me glad. Show me thyself, and I will rejoice with exceeding great joy.

See how the stars above as well as men below pay their obeisances to the New-born King!! My soul, be not slow to adore thy Savior! The star moved "till it came and stood over where the young child was": so will my heart never rest till it finds out the Lord.

11. *And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.*

Those who look for Jesus will see him: those who truly see him will worship him: those who worship him will consecrate their substance to him. The gold and spices were presented, not to Mary, but "unto him." The wise men kept their caskets closed till they saw Jesus, and then they opened their treasures. Let us keep our love and our holy service for our Lord's eye, and never wish to expose them to the world's gaze. The wise men's gifts were royal, with a touch of the priestly in them — "gold, and frankincense, and myrrh." These choice offerings especially the gold, would help Joseph and Mary to provide for the Royal Child, who was so soon to be exiled. God brought providers from the far East to supply the needs of his Son. "Remember that Omnipotence has servants everywhere." Before the babe starts for Egypt, Oriental sages must pay his charges.

Lord, thou shalt have my worship, and my gifts; for thou art the sole Monarch of my soul: and I will aid thy missionary cause, that when thou goest into Africa with thy gospel, my gifts may go with thee.

12. *And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.*

Probably, they half suspected Herod already; and the Lord by a dream led their

thoughts further in the same direction. Wise men need to be “warned of God”; when they are so, they alter their minds at once. Though they had planned to return by one route, they took another: they did not linger, but “departed into their own country another way.” Oh, that I may never be disobedient to a hint from the throne! “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel.”

13. *And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.*

Angels were busy in those days, for they had special charge of their Royal Master. Joseph’s high office, as guardian of the young child and his mother, involved him in care, and made him an exile from his country. We cannot expect to serve the Lord, and yet have an easy time of it. We must cheerfully journey across a desert if we have a charge to keep for our God; and we must tarry in banishment, if need be, and never venture to come back till the Lord sends us our passports. Our orders are, “Be thou there until I bring thee word.” The Lord’s servants must wait for the Lord’s word before they make a move, whether it be to go abroad or to come home. Waiting is hard work, especially waiting in Egypt; but it is safe to tarry till we have our marching orders.

14, 15. *When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.*

Night journeys, both actual and spiritual, may fall to the lot of those who carry Jesus with them. Even the Son of God, who is preeminent above all others, must depart into Egypt like the rest of the family, and must only come out of it when he is called. Let us not wonder if we, also, have to go down to Egypt, and go in a hurry, and go by night, and are allowed to stay there for many a day. We, too, shall be called out in due time by him whose call is effectual. The angel who leads us into Egypt will bring us word to come forth from it; for all our times are in the Lord’s hands. Let us never forget that the chosen may have to go into Egypt, but they must be brought out of it, for the rule is of universal bearing,

“Out of Egypt have I called my son.”

How the prophecies mark out our Lord’s way from the beginning! The King of Israel comes out of Egypt, even as Moses did, who in his day was King in Jeshurun.

16. *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.*

Herod, with all his craftiness, misses his mark. He considers that he is made a fool of, though the wise men had no such intention. Proud men are quick to imaging insults. He is furious: he must kill this newborn King lest he claim his crown; and therefore he orders the death of every two-year-old child in Bethlehem, taking good margin, that none might escape through error in the age. What mattered it to him if a few babes were needlessly slain? He must make sure that the. little King is made an end of; and he imagines that a speedy and indiscriminate slaughter of all who have reached their second year will put him beyond all fear of this reputed rival. Men will do anything to be rid of Jesus. They care not how many children, or men, or women, are destroyed, so that they can but resist his kingdom, and crush his holy cause in its infancy. Yet vain is their rage: the holy child is beyond their jurisdiction and their sword.

17, 18. *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, sayings, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.*

Our Prince steps along a pathway paved with prophecies. Yet see what trouble attends his early days! The weeping prophet foretells the wailing over the innocents. He is the innocent cause of the death of many innocents. Men say that religion has been the cause of cruelty and bloodshed: honesty should compel them to admit, that not religion, but opposition to religion, has done this. What! blame Jesus because Herod sought to murder him, and therefore made so many

mothers weep over their dead babes! What three drops of gall are these — “lamentation, and weeping and great mourning”! The triple mixture is all too common.

Our Rachels still weep; but holy women who know the Lord Jesus, do not now say concerning their little ones that “they are not.” They know that their children are, and the, know where they are, and they expect to meet them again in glory. Surely, if these women had but known, they might have been comforted by the fact, that though their little ones were slain, The Children’s Friend had escaped and still lived to be the Savior of all who die before committing actual transgression.

19, 20. *But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child’s life.*

Angels again! Yes, and they are busy still around “the beloved of the Lord.” Joseph still watches over his honored charge, even as Joseph of old watched over Israel in Egypt. See the order in which the family is arranged, — “the young child and his mother.” The Lord is placed first: it is not here, as at Rome, “the Virgin and child.” The angel loathed to mention Herod’s name, but said, “They are dead.” Such a wretch did not deserve to be named by a holy angel. Herod had gone to his own place, and now the Lord brings back his banished ones to their own place. Instead of making Jesus to die, the tyrant is dead himself. Sword in hand, he missed the young child; but without a sword, that child’s Father struck home to his heart. It is a relief to the world when some men die: it was certainly so in the case of Herod. Those who keep our King out of his own are not likely to live long. My soul, ponder the lessons of history concerning the King’s adversaries!

21, 22. *And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the part of Galilee.*

Joseph obeyed without question. “He arose”: that is to say, as soon as he was awake he set about doing as he was bidden. At once he made the journey and came into the land of Israel; so should we hasten to obey. He had his fears about Judea; yet he did not follow his fears, but only went as his guide from heaven directed him. This Joseph was a dreamer like his namesake of old; and he was also a practical man, and turned his dreams to wise account. He “came into the land of Israel”, but he was allowed to go into that part of it which was under a gentler sway than that of Archeaus, who was no improvement upon his father. Galilee, a despised country, a land where Gentiles mixed with the Jews, a dark and ignorant part, was to be the land of our Lord’s early days. He was of the common people, and he was educated in a rustic region, in “the parse of Galilee”, among a plain folk, who had none of the fine manners of the towns. Blessed King, the days of thy minority were not spent at court, but among the common multitude, whom still thou cost delight to bless! I pray thee, turn aside into the parts of this Galilee, and abide with me.

23. *And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.*

Our Lord was called “Netzar”, THE BRANCH. Probably this is the prophecy referred to; for “Nazareth “signifies sprouts or shoots. Possibly some unrecorded prophecy, often repeated by the prophets, and known to all the people, is here alluded to. Certainly he has long been called a “Nazarene”, both by Jews and violent unbelievers. Spitting on the ground in disgust, many a time has his fierce adversary hissed out the name “Nazarene”, as if it were the climax of contempt. Yet, O Nazarene, thou hast triumphed! Jesus of Nazareth”, the greatest name among men. O Lord, my King, as thou art dishonored by thy foes, so shalt thou be adored among thy friends, with all their heart and all their soul. While others call thee “Nazarene”, we call thee Jesus — Jehovah, King of kings, and Lord of lords.

Matthew 3

The King has been in concealment long enough, and it is time for his herald to appear and proclaim his coming. This chapter tells us of the champion who came in advance of the King.

1. *In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

While Jesus still remained at Nazareth, his kinsman, the Baptizer, made his appearance: the morning star is seen before the sun. John came not to the court, but to lone wildernesses: places left to sheep and a handful of rural folk. The mission of Christ Jesus is to the moral wastes and to the desolate places of the earth. To them the Lord's harbinger makes his way, and there he fitly preaches the command, "Repent ye." Give up your thorns and briars, O ye wildernesses; for your Lord is coming to you! See how John announces the coming kingdom, how he bids men make ready for it, and he v he urges them to be speedy in their preparation: "For the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Let me be ready for my Lord's coming, and put away all that would grieve his Holy Spirit!

3. *For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the lord, make his paths straight.*

Matthew keeps to his custom of quoting from the Old Testament. The prophets not only described the King, but his forerunner also. They mention the character of this harbinger: he was a "voice"; (Jesus is "the Word"); his tone, "crying"; his place, "in the wilderness"; and his message, which was one of announcement, in which he required preparation for the coming king: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord."

Men's hearts were like a wilderness, wherein there is no way; but as loyal subjects throw up roads for the approach of beloved princes, so were men to welcome the Lord, with their hearts made right and ready to receive him.

O Lord, I would welcome thee if thou wouldst come to me. I have greet need of thy royal presence, and therefore I would prepare a way for thee. Into my heart my desires have made for thee a path most short and smooth. Come, Lord, and tarry not! Come into my wilderness nature and transform it into a garden of the Lord.

4. *And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.*

He was rough and stern, like Elijah. His garments betokened his simplicity, his sternness, his self-denial. His food, the product of the desert where he dwelt, showed that he cared nothing for luxuries. His whole bearing was symbolical; but it was also fit, and suitable for his office. The plainest of food is best for body and mind and spirit, and, moreover, it fosters manliness. Lord, let not my meat, or drink, or garments, hinder me in thy work!

5, 6. *Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.*

The people were expecting a Messiah, and so they went en masse to John as soon as his shrill voice had startled the solitudes. Baptism, or the washing of the body in water, most fitly accompanied the cry, "Repent ye." The "Confessing their sins "which went with baptism in Jordan gave it its meaning. Apart from the acknowledgment of guilt, it would have been a mere bathing of the person without spiritual significance; but the confession which went with it made it an instructive sign. John must have inwardly wondered to see the multitudes come; but his chief thought ran forward to his coming Lord. He thought more of him than of "all Judea."

7. *But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned*

you to flee from the wrath to come?

It was strange to see the proud Separatists and the skeptical Moralists come to be baptized; and therefore, as a test, John addressed them with scorching words. He saw that they, were serpentine in their motives and viperish in their tempers, and so he calls them “Progeny of vipers”: thus would he see whether they were sincere or not. He asks who suggested to them to flee from that wrath of which he was the forerunner, according to the closing words of the Old Testament. This enquiry was not complimentary; but it is no business of the Lord’s servants to make themselves pleasing: they must be faithful, and especially so to the great and learned. Thus faithful was John the Baptist, and he was honored for it by him that sent him.

8. *Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.*

Act as a change of mind would lead you to do: above all, quit the pride in which you enwrap yourselves, and leave the serpent motives which now actuate you. Lord, save us from a fruitless repentance, which would be only an aggravation of our previous sins.

9. *And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

Do not imagine that God needs you in order to fulfill his promise to his servant Abraham; for he can make each stone in Jordan into an heir of grace. Do not presume upon your ancestry, and think that all the blessings of the coming kingdom must be yours because you are of the seed of the father of the faithful. God can as easily make sons of stones as of a generation of vipers. He will never be short of means for fulfilling his covenant, without bowing his gospel before the caprice of vainglorious men. He will find a people in the slums if his gospel is rejected by the respectable. Let none of us, because we are orthodox, or exceedingly Scriptural in our religious observances, dream that we must therefore be in the favor of God, and that we are under no necessity to repent. God can do without us; but we cannot do without repentance and the works which prove it true. What a blessing that he can transform hearts of stone into

filial spirits! Wonders of grace to God belong!

10. *And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

He means, the King is come: the Cutter-down of every fruitless tree has arrived. The Great Woodman has thrown down his axe at “the root of the trees.” He lifts the axe; he strikes; the fruitless tree is felled; it is cast into the fire. The sketch is full of life. The Baptizer sees forests falling beneath the axe; for he whom he heralds will be the Judge of men, and the Executioner of righteousness. What an announcement he had to make! What a scene his believing eye beheld! Our vision is much the same: the axe is still at work. Lord, cut me not down for the fire. I know that the absence of good fruit is as fatal as the presence of corrupt fruit: Lord, let me not be a mere negative, lest I be “hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

11. *I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire.*

John could plunge the penitent into water; but a greater than he must baptize men into the Holy Ghost and into fire. Repentance is well attended by washing in water; but the true baptism of the believer by the Lord Jesus himself brings us into spiritual floods of holy fire. John considered himself to be nothing more than a household slave, unworthy of the office of removing his Master’s sandals; and his baptism in water was as much inferior to the Spirit-baptism as a slave to his lord. Jesus is the divine Lord who covers us with the fiery influences of the Holy Spirit. Do we know this baptism? What is water-baptism without it? What are all the Johns in the world, with their baptisms in water, when compared with Jesus and his baptism into fire!

12. *Whose fan is in his hand and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

He sets forth his Lord under another figure; that of a Husbandman. This time he holds in his hand, not the axe, but the winnowing shovel. Pharisees, Sadducees, and all the rest, lie on his floor: it is with them he deals: “He will thoroughly purge his floor.” If they do not wish to be purified by him, they should not be there: but there they are, and he deals with them. His fan is in his hand: he throws up the heap to the breeze, that he may test and divide. His wheat he gathers; for this he seeks. The chaff is blown further off to the place where a fire is burning, and so it is consumed out of the way by what he tells us is unquenchable fire. Our Lord’s teaching would act like a great winnowing fan, leaving the true by themselves, and driving off the false and worthless to utter destruction. It was so in the life of our Lord; it is so every day where he is preached. He is the Great Divider. It is his Word which separates the sinners from the saints, and gathers out a people for himself.

Thus the herald prepared the people for the King, who would be the Cleanser, the Hewer, the Winnower. My soul, behold thy Lord under these aspects, and reverence him!

13. *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.*

In due time, when all was prepared, the Prince quitted his obscurity. Putting himself in a lowly place, he did not summon the Baptizer to come to the Lake of Galilee, but went down the country along the banks of the Jordan to him, seeking baptism. Should any of the servants neglect what their Lord so heartily attended to? Do any say, “It is not essential”? Was it essential to our Lord Jesus? He said, “It becometh us” and what was becoming in him is not unbecoming in his followers. If it should cost us a journey, let us attend to the command which is binding on all believers.

14. *But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*

This was very natural. John knew Jesus to be eminently more holy than himself, and therefore he protested against appearing to be his purifier. John was strong in this protest: he “forbad him”: it seemed to him to be out of order for him to baptize one so supremely good. Although he was not yet assured from heaven

that Jesus was the Messiah (for he had not yet seen the Spirit descending and resting upon him), yet he shrewdly guessed that Jesus was indeed the Christ. He knew him to be a very special favorite of heaven, superior to himself, and he therefore expected that sign by which he had been assured the Christ would be known.

John never shirked a duty, but he declined an honor. He would not even seem to be of any consequence as compared with his Lord. Blessed Jesus, teach us like humility!

15. *And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him.*

Jesus answered John so completely, that he ceased his opposition at once. It was becoming both in John and in Jesus that our Lord should be baptized of him. This assurance satisfied the Baptist so far that, still under protest, “he suffered him.” Baptism was becoming even in our Lord, who needed no personal purification; for he was the Head over all things to his Church, and it was becoming that he should be as the members should be. Baptism beautifully sets forth our Lord’s immersion in suffering, his burial, and his resurrection. Thus typically, it fulfills “all righteousness.” The ordinance is most full of meaning when rightly observed; and it is to be most reverently regarded, since our Lord himself submitted to it. Shall I refuse to follow my Lord? Shall I think that there is nothing in an ordinance of which he said, “Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness?”

16, 17. *And Jesus, when he was baptized went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: and lo a voice from I heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

Our Lord went down into the water, for “he went up out of the water.” He did not tarry, in he had fulfilled the river; but when one duty he straightway went on his way to carry out another. In Baptism, our Lord was openly attested and sealed as the “beloved Son “, both by the Word of God, and the Spirit of God.

What more witness is needed? It is often so with his people: their sonship is made clear during an act of obedience, and the Word and the Spirit bear witness with their consciences.

Our Lord Jesus had now to enter on his public life-work, and he did so in the best manner. The world was opening before him, “and the heavens were opened unto him.” As his need appeared, his source of supply was set open before him. On him also the divine anointing descended. Like a swift-winged, pure, and quiet dove, “the Spirit of God” came, and found a resting-place in him. When he had been immersed into the element of water, he was immediately surrounded by the divine element of the Spirit. Then, also, was his ear charmed with the Father’s audible acknowledgment of him, and with the expression of that good pleasure which the Lord God had always felt in him. It was a glorious moment. Our King was now proclaimed and anointed. Would not his next step be to take the Kingdom? We shall see.

Our Lord and King is now fully before us. He has been preceded, predicted, and pointed out by John the Baptist; he has been dedicated to his work in baptism; he has been anointed by the Spirit, and confessed by the Father; and therefore he has fairly entered upon his royal work. May none of us in the service of the Lord run before our time, or go forward without a sense of the Father’s approval, and without that spiritual unction which is from above!

O my Lord, let me be anointed and approved in my measure, even as thou wast in shine. In order to this, I would behold shine anointing of the Spirit with the full belief that I am anointed in thee, as the body receives unction in the anointing of the Head.

Matthew 4

1. *Then was Jesus led to of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

No sooner anointed than assailed. He did not seek temptation, but was “led of the Spirit.” The time selected was immediately after his Sonship had been attested, when we might have thought that he was least likely to be attacked upon that point. Times of hallowed enjoyment verge on periods of temptation. Our Lord was led “into the wilderness”: the place was one of great solitude, where he would be alone in the conflict. The devil himself came to the spot and plied his diabolical arts upon the man ordained to be his Destroyer.

Let me be ever on my watch-tower, and particularly during seasons of great enjoyment; for then is Satan most likely to assail me. Lord Jesus, be thou with me in the hour of my testing; for thou knowest how to succor the tempted.

2. *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights he was afterward an hungered.*

Throughout the long fast he was miraculously sustained; but at the close of it hunger began to try him. We are more in danger when our labor or suffering is over than during the time of its continuance. Now that the Lord is drained dry by his long fast, and is made faint by hunger, the enemy will be upon him. The devil is a great coward, and takes a mean advantage of us.

Lord make me a match for the enemy!

3. *And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*

He adapted the temptation to the circumstances: he tempted a hungry man with bread. He put it very cunningly. Only one single word, and the hard stone of the desert would be biscuit: let him undertake to be his own provider, and use his miraculous power as "Son of God" to spread a table for himself. The tempter begins his suggestion with an "if", an "if" about his Sonship: this is his usual fashion. He bids the Lord prove his Sonship by catering for himself; and yet that would have been the surest way to prove that he was not the Son of God. A true son will not doubt his father, and undertake to provide his own bread: he will wait to be fed by his father's hand. The evil one would have the only-begotten Son cease to depend on God, and take matters into his own hands. Temptations to unbelieving self-help are common enough, but very dangerous.

4. *But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*

Out flashed the sword of the Spirit: our Lord will fight with no other weapon. He could have spoken new revelations, but he chose to say, "It is written." There is a power in the Word of God which even the devil cannot deny.

Our life and its sustenance are not dependent upon the visible, though the visible is ordinarily used for our support: we "live not by bread alone", though it is the usual means of our support. He who sustained the Savior fasting for forty days could still keep him alive without bread. The secret influence of the word of Omnipotence could keep the vital forces in action even without bread. Bread owes its power to nourish our bodies to the secret agency of God, end that divine agency could work as surely without the usual means as with them. The word of the Lord which made the heavens can assuredly support all that it has made. Our Lord Jesus, in fact, told the tempter that he would not distrust the providence of God, but would wait his Father's time for feeding him, and would by no means be driven to an act of unbelief and self-reliance.

5, 6. *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.*

This second temptation is a cunning one: he is persuaded rather to believe too much than too little. He is not now to take care of himself, but recklessly to presume, and trust his Father's promise beyond its meaning. The place was cunningly chosen; temple-pinnacles are not safe standing; high and holy places are open to temptation. The posture was advantageous to the tempter, for nature feels a tendency to fall when set "on a pinnacle." The aim of the fiery dart was at our Lord's Sonship: "If thou be the Son of God." If the enemy could have hurt our Lord's filial confidence, he would have gained his design.

Satan borrowed our Lord's weapon, and said, "It is written"; but he did not use the sword lawfully. It was not in the nature of the false fiend to quote correctly. He left out the necessary words, "in all thy ways": thus he made the promise say what in truth it never suggested, and then boldly prescribed a course which the law of God would condemn, saying, "Cast thyself down." We are to be kept in our ways, but not in our follies. The omission of a word may spoil the meaning of a Scripture; verbal inspiration makes accurate quotation to be a duty, as the omission of a word or two entirely alters the sense. What reliable inspiration can there be except that which suggests words as well as ideas?

Hear how the devil talks about angels, their Lord, their charge, their care, and their diligence: a man may handle holy subjects with great familiarity, and yet be himself unholy. It is ill to talk of angels, and yet to act like devils.

See how the fiend passes from a temptation about humble bread to one of an ambitious and daring character: he hopes by a sudden change to catch the Lord in one way, even if he escaped from him in another. But our Lord was ready for him. His sword was on guard for all kinds of strokes. May his grace keep us in the same manner well armed against the foe! Though the enemy alters his tactics, we must not cease our resistance, or change our weapon.

7. *Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the lord thy God.*

"It is written again." One text must not be looked at alone, and magnified out of proportion, as if it were the whole Bible: each utterance of the Lord must be taken in connection with other parts of Scripture. There is a balance and proportion in divine truth. "It is written" is to be set side by side with "It is written again."

How short and decisive was the stroke of our Lord upon the great enemy! He meets a falsely-quoted promise with a plain precept, forbidding us to presume. “Thou shalt not” from the mouth of God is the shield of conscience against a foul temptation. Our rule of action is neither a promise nor a providence; but the clear command of the Lord. Presumption is a tempting of God; and to “tempt the Lord” is not to be thought of for a moment. Remember, believer, he is “thy God”, to be trusted, not to be tempted. The second time the adversary was so completely, baffled that he made no reply, but changed his line of warfare.

Lord, suffer me not to sin presumptuously, nor to act rashly! I see that faith is for ways of obedience, not for flights of fancy. Let me not cast myself down, and so throw myself out of the range of thy promised keeping.

8, 9. *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.*

Wretched traitor! None of these kingdoms were really his own; they were in truth the rightful heritage of the Lord to whom he pretended he could give them. How he opened his mouth and said, “All these things will I give thee”! A poor all after all; and it would only have been a stolen gift had he bestowed it. Yet it would have been to any of us a very dazzling and fascinating sight; for the glories of even one kingdom make hearts beat, and eyes glisten, and feet slip. The bait is sweet, but the hook lies under it. The glittering glory would be bought too dear by that demand —”fall down and worship me.” If Jesus would have adopted carnal means, he would soon have had “the kingdoms of the world” at his feet. A little tampering with truth, and a little flattery of prejudice, and he might have had many men around him, irresistible in their fanaticism. By their enthusiastic efforts he would soon have been able to wield a mighty power, before which Rome would have fallen. Our holy Lord disdained to use the help of evil, though the master of wickedness promised him success. How could he bow down before the devil? It was the height of impudence for the false fiend to invite worship from the perfect One. Christ at the devil’s feet! It reminds us of religion supported by theatricals and raffles. What gift of the foul fiend could tempt the Son of God to be the servant of evil? The tempter does not dare to mention Sonship in this case; for that would have laid the blasphemous

suggestion too bare. No son of God can worship the devil.

O Lord, grant that if over we should hunger and be in poverty, like our Lord, we may never yield to the temptation to do wrong to gain wealth and honor, or even the supply of pressing need! May thy Church never yield to the world with the idea of setting up the kingdom of Christ in a more easy and rapid manner than by the simple preaching of the gospel!

10. *Then said Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*

The Lord spake strongly to the tempter. Satan had betrayed his own character, and now he gets his proper name, and is ordered into his proper place. How that word staggered him — "Get thee hence"! This was the final word which banished him from the Lord's presence. How he slunk away He hastened off ashamed, line a dog who is sent home.

Our Lord gave him a parting stroke with the sword of the Spirit: again he said, "It is written." God's command, which demands all worship and service for Jehovah, the covenant God only, was a word for Satan to remember when he dived hastily into the nether deep to hide his head in confusion at his complete defeat. He, too, is under law to God, and cannot cast away his cords from him. Oh, that we may own the power of this precept, and feel that we have nothing to do with winning even the whole world and its glory, but are to give our entire lives to the service of the one Lord! Idolatry of the creature withers under the scorching heat of this imperative law of the Highest. We must not pay even a shade of deference to evil, though the whole world should be the reward of a single act of sinful submission to it: "Him only shalt thou serve." Ours it is to choose Jehovah for our God, and then to live alone for his praise and service.

It is noteworthy that all the passages quoted by our Lord are from the Book of Deuteronomy, which book has been so grievously assailed by the destructive critics. Thus did our Lord put special honor upon that part of the Old Testament which he foresaw would be most attacked. The past few years have proved that the devil does not like Deuteronomy: he would fain avenge himself for the wounds it caused him on this most memorable occasion.

11. *Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and*

ministered unto him.

The enemy left him when he had shot his last bolt; but even then he left him only for a season, minding to return at the first opportunity. Only when he has tried his utmost will the tempter let a child of God alone, and even then he will watch for another opportunity.

So soon as the evil one had departed, angels appeared to fulfill a ministry for which they eagerly longed, but which the presence of the devil hindered. No doubt they had been hovering near, waiting their opportunity. These holy beings might not come upon the scene while the battle was being fought, lest they should seem to divide the honors of the day; but when the duel was ended, they hastened to bring food for the body, and comfort for the mind of the champion King. It was a battle royal, and the victory deserved to be celebrated by the courtiers of the heavenly King. Let us behold, these angels, learn from their example, and believe that they are also near to all the warriors of the cross in their hour of conflict with the fiend.

O Tempted but Triumphant King, thy servants worship thee, and ask permission and grace to minister to thee as angels did!

12. *Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee.*

The history is not consecutive, for it was not Matthew's design to make it so. He leaves out much that others record, because not suitable for his purpose. Possibly John was put in prison more than once. It seems that the imprisonment of John called our Lord away from the immediate scene of persecution to the more rustic region of Galilee. He became the more publicly active when his forerunner was laid aside. As the morning star is hidden, the sun shines out the more brightly. His departure was not caused by fear, nor by desire of self-pleasing; but he moved under the guidance of the Lord God who sent him.

13-16. *And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the*

prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung tip,

Note how the movements of our King are all ordered according to diving prophecy. “Leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum” to fulfill a passage in the book of Isaiah. There was an ancient programme which settled from of old the track of his royal progresses. He went where the foreknowledge and predestination of Jehovah had declared his way.

He went, moreover, where he was needed, even to “the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim.” The “real light” encountered the great darkness; the far-off ones were visited by him who gathers together the outcasts of Israel. Our Lord courts not those who glory in their light, but those who pine in their darkness: he comes with heavenly life, not to those who boast of their own life and energy, but to those who are under condemnation, and who feel the shades of death shutting them out from light and hope. “Great light” is a very suggestive figure for the gospel, and “sitting in the region and shadow of death” is a very graphic description of men bowed under the power of sin, and paralyzed by fear of condemnation. What a mercy that to those who appear out of the reach of the usual means, to those who dwell “by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles”, Jesus comes with power to enlighten and quicken!

If I feel myself to be an out-of-the-way sinner, Lord, come to me, and cause me to know that “light is sprung up” even for me!

17. *From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

He continued the warning which John had given: “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” The King exceeds his herald, but he does not differ from him as to his message. Happy is the preacher whose word is such that his Lord can endorse it! Repentance is the demand of the Law, of the Gospel, and of John, who was the connecting link between the two. Immediate repentance is demanded because the theocracy is established: the kingdom demands turning from sin. In Christ Jesus God was about to reign among the sons of men, and

therefore men were to seek peace with him. How much more ought we to repent who live in the midst of that kingdom! What manner of persons ought we to be who look for his Second Advent! “The kingdom of heaven is at hand”, let us be as men that look for their Lord. O my gracious King and Savior, I pray thee, accept my repentance as to past rebellions as a proof of my present loyalty!

18, 19. *And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*

Our Lord not only preached the kingdom, but he now began to call one and another into its service, and I privilege. He was “walking by the sea”: and there and then he began his converting, calling, and ordaining work. Where he found himself living, there he put forth his power. Our sphere is where we are.

Jesus had a special eye for fishers. He summoned to his side the fishing:, brothers whom he had chosen from of old. He had previously called them by grace, and now he calls them into the ministry. They were busy in a lawful occupation when he called them to be ministers: our Lord does not call idlers but fishers. His word was imperial — “Follow me”, his work was appropriate to their occupation as fishers; it was full of royal promise — “I will make you fishers of men”; and it was eminently instructive; for an evangelist and a fisher have man, points of likeness. From this passage we learn that nobody can make a man-fisher but our Lord himself, and that those whom he calls can only become successful by following him.

Lord, as a winner of souls cause me to imitate thy spirit and method, that I may not labor in vain!

20. *And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.*

The call was effectual. No nets can entangle those whom Jesus calls to follow him. They come straightway; they come at all cost; they come without a question; they come to quit old haunts; they come to follow their leader without stipulation or reserve.

Lord, cause me ever to be thy faithful and unhesitating follower as long as I live! May no nets detain me when thou cost call me!

21, 22. *And going on from thence he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.*

Our Lord delighted in fishermen: possibly their bold, heart:, outspoken character fitted them for his service. At any rate, these would be the briars upon which he could graft the roses of his grace. Some he calls to preach when casting their nets. and some while mending them; but in either case they are busy. We shall need both to cast and mend nets after we are called unto our Lord's work. Note how our Lord again calls two brethren. Two together are better far than one and one acting singly. The Lord knows that our nature seeks companionship; no companion in work is better than a brother.

This second pair of bothers "left their father" as well as their fishery; the first left their nets, but these "left the ship"; the first have no relatives mentioned, but these quitted father and mother for Christ's sake; and they did it as unhesitatingly as the others. It did not seem much of a prospect, to follow the houseless Jesus; but an inward attraction drew them, and they followed on, charmed to obey the voice divine. Zebedee may have thought his sons' going was a great loss to him; but it is not recorded that he expressed any objection to their doing so. Perhaps he gladly gave up his boys for such a service; we feel sure that their mother did. In the service of Jesus we are not to be restrained by ties of kindred: he has a higher claim than father or husband.

Lord, call me, and my brother, and all my family into thy grace, if not into thy ministry!

23. *And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.*

Our Lord was ever on the move: "he went about all Galilee." The Great Itinerant

made a province his parish. He taught “in their synagogues”, but he was equally at home in their streets: he cared nothing for consecrated places. Teaching and preaching go well with healing; thus soul and body are both taken care of. Our Lord’s great power is seen in the universality of his healing energy: healing “all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.” Dwell on those words, “all manner.” But our Lord was not content with miracles for the body, he had the gospel for the soul, that gospel which lies in his own person as King, in his promise of pardon to believers, and in his rule of love over those who are loyal to him. He preached “the gospel of the kingdom”, a right royal gospel, which made men kings and priests. To this gospel the miracles of healing were so many seals. At this day the healing of souls is an equally sure seal of God upon the gospel.

Lord, I know the truth and certainty of thy gospel; for I have felt thy healing hand upon my heart; may I feel the rule and power of thy kingdom, and joyfully yield myself to thy sway!

24. *And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatics, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them.*

Of course, men told one another of the great prophet. Even the regions beyond began to hear of him. Syria heard again that there was a God in Israel who could recover a man of his leprosy. Now the worst cases are brought to him; epileptics, the possessed, and the mad were led to him, and were not led in vain. What a bill of diseases we find in this verse! Diseases, torments, devils, lunacy, palsy, and so forth. And what a receipt at the foot: “and he healed them”! Oh, that men were eager to bring their spiritual ailments to the Savior! It would lead to the same result: in every case we should read, “he healed them.”

Our King surrounded himself with the spiritual pomp of gratitude by displaying his power to bless the afflicted. Some kings have pretended to heal by their touch, but Jesus really did so. Never king, or prophet, could work such marvels as he did. Well might “his fame” be great!

25. *And there followed him great multitudes or people from Galilee,*

and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.

Such a teacher is sure to have a following. Yet how small his spiritual following compared with the “great multitudes” who outwardly came to him! Our King has many nominal subjects; but few there are who know him as their Lord, so as to be renewed in heart by the power of his grace: these along enter truly into his kingdom, and it is foolish and wicked to talk of including any others in his spiritual domain. Yet is it a hopeful sign when there is a great inquiry after Jesus, and every region and city yields its quota to the hearing throng.

Matthew 5

1. *And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him.*

For retirement, fresh air, and wide space, the King seeks the hill-side. It was suitable that such elevated ethics should be taught from a mountain. A natural hill suited his truthful teaching better than a pulpit of marble would have done. Those who desired to follow him as disciples gathered closely about the seated Rabbi, who occupied the throne of instruction in their midst; and then in outer circles “the multitudes” stood to listen.

2. *And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,*

Even when his mouth was closed he was teaching by his life; yet he did not withhold the testimony of his lips. Earnest men, when they address their fellows, neither mumble, nor stumble, but speak distinctly, opening their mouths. When Jesus opens his mouth let us open our ears and hearts.

3. *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The King’s first statutes are Benedictions. He begins his teaching with a largess of blessings. The Old Testament ended with “a curse”: the New Testament opens with “Blessed.” This word is by some rendered “happy”; but we like blessed best. Our Lord brings to men true Beatitudes by his teaching, and by his kingdom.

Spiritual poverty is both commanded and commended. It is the basis of Christian experience. No one begins aright who has not felt poverty of spirit. Yet even to this first sign of grace is the kingdom given in present possession: “theirs is the

kingdom of heaven." The question in heaven's kingdom is not, "Are you a peer?" but, "Are you poor in spirit?" Those who are of no account in their own eyes are of the blood royal of the universe. These alone have the principles and the qualifications for heavenly kingdom. May I be such!

4. *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

These seem worse off than the merely poor in spirit, for "they mourn." They are a stage higher, though they seem to be a stage lower. The way to rise in the kingdom is to sink in ourselves. These men are grieved by sin, and tried by the evils of the times but for them a future of rest and rejoicing is provided. Those who laugh shall lament, but those who sorrow shall sing. How great a blessing is sorrow, since it gives room for the Lord to administer comfort! Our griefs are blessed, for they are our points of contact with the divine Comforter. The beatitude reads like a paradox, but it is true, as some of us know full well. Our mourning hours have brought us more comfort than our days of mirth.

5. *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*

They are lowly-minded, and are ready to give up their portion in the earth; therefore it shall come back to them. They neither boast, nor contend, nor exult over others, yet are they heirs of all the good which God has created on the face of the earth. In their meekness they are like their King, and they shall reign with him. The promised land is for the tribes of the meek: before them the Canaanites shall be driven out. He has the best of this world who thinks least of it, and least of himself.

6. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*

They are not full of their own righteousness, but long for more and more of that which comes from above. They pine to be right themselves both with God and man, and they long to see righteousness have the upper hand all the world over. Such is their longing for goodness, that it would seem as if both the appetites of "hunger and thirst" were concentrated in their one passion for righteousness. Where God works such an insatiable desire, we may be quite sure that he will

satisfy it; yea, fill it to the brim. In contemplating the righteousness of God, the righteousness of Christ, and the victory of righteousness in the latter days, we are more than filled. In the world to come the satisfaction of the “man of desires” will be complete Nothing here below can fill an immortal soul; and since it is written, “They shall be filled,” we look forward with joyful confidence to a heaven of holiness with which we shall be satisfied eternally.

7. *Blessed are the merciful: fur they shall obtain mercy.*

They forgive, and they are forgiven. They judge charitably, and they shall not be condemned. They help the needy, and they shall be helped in their need. What we are to others, God will be to us. Some have to labor hard with their niggardliness in order to be kind; but the blessing lies not only in doing a merciful act, but in being merciful in disposition. Followers of Jesus must be men of mercy; for they have found mercy, and mercy has found them. As we look for “mercy, of the Lord in that day “, we must show mercy in this day.

8. *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

Foul hearts make dim eyes Godward. To clear the eye we must cleanse the heart. Only purity has any idea of God, or any true vision of him. It is a great reward to be able to see God; and, on the other hand, it is of great help towards being pure in heart to have a true sight of the thrice-holy One. There are no pure hearts on earth unless the Lord has made them so, and none shall see God in heaven who have not been purified by grace while here below. Lord, create in me a clean heart, that I may behold thee, both now and for ever!

9. *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

They are not only passively peaceful, like the meek, who keep the peace; but actively peaceful by endeavoring to end wars and contentions, and so make peace. These not only are the children of the peace-loving God, but they come to be called so; for men are struck by their likeness to their Father. Hereby is our sonship known to ourselves and others. Men of peace are the children of the God of peace, and their Father’s blessing rests on them.

This seventh beatitude is a very high and glorious one; let us all endeavor to obtain it. Never let us be peacebreakers; evermore let us be peacemakers. Yet must we not cry “peace, peace, where there is no peace.” The verse before, this speaks of purity, and this of peace. First pure, then peaceable: this is God’s order, and it should be ours.

10. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

This is the peculiar blessing of the elect of God, and it stands high up in the list of honor. The only homage which wickedness can pay to righteousness is to persecute it. Those who in the first blessing were poor in spirit, are here despised as well as poverty stricken: and in this they get a new royal charter, which for the second time ensures to them “the kingdom of heaven.” Yea, they have the kingdom now: it is theirs in present possession. Not because of any personal fault, but simply on account of their godly character, the Lord’s Daniels are hated: but they are blessed by that which looks like a curse. Ishmael mocks Isaac; but nevertheless Isaac has the inheritance, and Ishmael is cast out. It is a gift from God to be allowed to suffer for his name. So may we be helped to rejoice in Christ’s cross when we are honored by being reviled for his name’s sake.

11, 12. *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

Persecution of the tongue is more common, but not less cruel than that of the hand. Slander is unscrupulous, and indulges in accusations of every kind: “all manner of evil” is a comprehensive phrase. No crime is too base to be laid at the door of the innocent; nor will the persecutor have any hesitation as to the vileness of the charge. The rule seems to be, “Throw plenty of mud, and some of it will stick.” Under this very grievous trial, good men are to be more than ordinarily happy, for thus are the elevated to the rank of the prophets, upon whom the storm of falsehood beat with tremendous fury. “So persecuted they the prophets.” This is the heritage of the Lord’s messengers: they killed one, and

stoned another. The honor of suffering with the prophets, for the Lord's sake, is so great, that it may well reconcile us to all that it involves. There is an inquisitorial succession of persecutors; "for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"; and there is a prophetical succession of saints, ordained to glorify the Lord in the fires. To this succession it is our high privilege to belong; and we are happy that it is so. Our joy and gladness are to exceed all ordinary bounds when we are honored with the decoration of the iron cross, and the collar of S.S., or savage slander.

13. *Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted a it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

Thus he speaks to those whom he enrolls in his kingdom. In their character there is a preserving force to keep the rest of society from utter corruption. If they were not scattered among men, the race would putrefy. But if they are Christians only in name, and the real power is gone, nothing can save them, and they are of no use whatever to those among whom they mingle. There is a secret something, which is the secret of the believer's power: that something is savor: it is not easy to define it, but yet it is absolutely essential to usefulness. A worldling may be of some use even if he fails in certain respects; but a Christian who is not a Christian is bad all round, he is "good for nothing", and utterly useless to anybody and everybody. Utter rejection awaits him: He will "be cast out, and trodden under foot of men." His religion makes a footpath for fashion, or for scorn, as the world may happen to take it: in either case it is no preservative, for it does not even preserve itself from contempt.

How this teaches the necessity of final perseverance! for if the savor of divine grace could be altogether gone from a man it could never be restored: the text is very clear and positive upon that point. What unscriptural nonsense to tall; of a man's being born again, and yet losing the divine life, and then getting it again. Regeneration cannot fail: if it did, the man must be for ever hopeless. He could not be born again, and again, and again: his case would be beyond the reach of mercy. :But who is hopeless? Are there any whom it is impossible to restore? If so, some may have altogether fallen from grace, but not else. Those who speak of all men as within the reach of grace may not scripturally or logically believe in total apostasy, since "it is impossible to restore them unto repentance", if any have really apostatized.

The great lesson is, that if grace itself fails to save a man, nothing else can be done for him. “If the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted?” You can salt meat, but you cannot salt salt: if grace fails everything fails. Gracious Master, do not permit me to try any experiments as to how far I may lose my savor; but ever keep me full of grace and truth.

14, 15. *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

We are to remove the darkness of ignorance, sin, and sorrow. Christ has lighted us that we may enlighten the world. It is not ours to lie in concealment as to our religion. God intends his grace to be as conspicuous as a city built on the mountain’s brow. To attempt to conceal his Spirit is as foolish as to put a lamp “under a bushel”: the lamp should be seen by “all that are in the house,” and so should the Christian’s graces. Household piety is the best of piety. If our light is not seen in the house, depend upon it we have none. Candles are meant for parlors and bedrooms. Let us not cover up the light of grace: indeed, we “cannot be hid” if once the Lord has built us on the hill of his love, neither can we dwell in darkness if God has lighted us, and set us “on a candlestick.”

Lord, let me be zealous to spread abroad the light I have received from thee Even throughout the world! At least let me shine in my own home.

16. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

The light is ours, but the glorification is for our Father in heaven. We shine because we have light, and we are seen because we shine. By good works we best shine before men. True shining is silent, but yet it is so useful, that men, who are too often very bad judges, are yet forced to bless God for the good which they receive through the light which he has kindled. Angels glorify God whom they see; and men are forced to glorify God whom they do not see, when they mark the “good works” of his saints. We need not object to be seen, although we are not to wish to be seen. Since men will be sure to see our excellences, if we possess any, be it ours to see that all the glory is given to our Lord, to whom it is entirely due. Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name, O

Lord, be praise!

17. *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.*

The Old Testament stands in all its parts, both as to “the late and the prophets.” The Lord Jesus knew nothing of “destructive criticism.” He establishes in its deepest sense all that is written in Holy Scripture, and puts a new fullness into it. This he says before he proceeds to make remarks upon the sayings of men of old time. He is himself the fulfillment and substance of the types, and prophecies, and commands of the law.

18. *For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

Not a syllable is to become effete. Even to the smallest letters, the dot of every “i”, and the crossing of every “t”, the law will outlast the creation. The Old Testament is as sacredly guarded as the New. “The Word of the Lord endureth for ever.” Modern critics have set themselves an impossible task in their endeavor to get rid of the inspiration of the whole sacred volume, or of this book, or that chapter, or that verse; for the whole shall come forth of their furnace as silver purified seven times.

19. *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

Our King has not come to abrogate the law, but to confirm and reassert it. His commands are eternal; and if any of the teachers of it should through error break his law, and teach that its least command is nullified, they will lose rank, and subside into the lowest place. The peerage of his kingdom is ordered according to obedience. Not birth, knowledge, or success will make a man great; but humble and precise obedience, both in word and in deed. “Whosoever shall do and teach,” he is the man who “shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Hence the Lord Jesus does not set up a milder law, nor will he allow any one of his servants to presume to do so. Our King fulfills the ancient law, and his Spirit works in us to will and to do of God's good pleasure as set forth in the immutable statutes of righteousness.

Lord, make me of this thy kingdom a right loyal subject, and may I both "do and teach" according to thy Word! Whether I am little or great on earth, make me great in obedience to thee.

20. *For I any unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

We cannot even "enter the kingdom" and begin to be the Lord's, without going beyond the foremost of the world's religionists. Believers are not to be worse in conduct, but far better than the most precise legalists. In heart, and even in act, we are to be superior to the law-writers, and the law-boasters. The kingdom is not for rebels, but for the exactly obedient. It not only requires of us holiness, reverence, integrity, and purity, but it works all these in our hearts and lives. The gospel does not give us outward liberty to sin because of the superior excellence of a supposed inner sanctity; but the rather it produces outward sanctity through working in our inmost soul a glorious freedom in the law of the Lord.

What a king we have in Jesus! What manner of persons ought we to be who avow ourselves to be in his holy kingdom! How conservative ought we to be of our Father's revealed will! How determined to allow no trifling with the law and the prophets!

It was needful for the Lord Jesus to clear away human traditions to make room for his own spiritual teaching.

21. *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.*

Antiquity is often pleaded as an authority; but our King makes short work of "them of old time." He begins with one of their alterations of his Father's law. They added to the sacred oracles. The first part of the saying which our Lord

quoted was divine; but it was dragged down to a low level by the addition about the human court, and the murderer's liability to appear there It thus became rather a proverb among men than an inspired utterance from the mouth of God. Its meaning, as God spake it, kind a far wider range than when the offense was restrained to actual killing, such as could be brought before a human judgment-seat. To narrow a command is measurably to annul it. We may not do this even with antiquity for our warrant. Better the whole truth newly stated than an old falsehood in ancient language.

22. *But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*

Murder lies within anger; for we wish harm to the object of our wrath, or even wish that he did not exist, and this is to kid him in desire. Anger "without a cause" is forbidden by the command which says "Thou shalt not kill"; for unjust anger is killing in intent. Such anger without cause brings us under higher judgment than that of Jewish police-courts. God takes cognizance of the emotions from which acts of hate may spring, and calls us to account as much for the angry feeling as for the murderous deed. Words also come under the same condemnation: a man shall be judged for what he "shall say to his brother." To call a man Raca, or a worthless fellow, is to kill him in his reputation; and to say to him, "Thou fool", is to kill him as to the noblest characteristics of a man. Hence all this comes under such censure as men distribute in their councils; yea, under what is far worse, the punishment awarded by the highest court of the universe, which dooms men to "hell fire." Thus our Lord and King restores the law of God to its true force, and warns us that it denounces not only the overt act of killing, but every thought, feeling, and word which would tend to injure a brother, or annihilate him by contempt.

What a sweeping law is this! My conscience might have been easy as to the command "Thou shalt not kill;" but if anger without just cause be murder, how shall I answer for it? "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation!"

23, 24. *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there*

rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

The Pharisee would urge as a cover for his malice that he brought a sacrifice to make atonement; but our Lord will have forgiveness rendered to our brother first, and then the offering presented. We ought to worship God thoughtfully; and if in the course of that thought we remember that our brother hath ought against us, we must stop. If we have wronged another, we are to pause, cease from the worship, and hasten to seek reconciliation. We easily remember if we have ought against our brother, but now the memory is to be turned the other way. Only when we have remembered our wrong -doing, and made reconciliation, can we hope for acceptance with the Lord. The rule is — first peace with man, and then acceptance with God. The holy must be traversed to reach the Holiest of all. Peace being made with our brother, then let us conclude our service towards our Father, and we shall do so with lighter heart and truer zeal.

I would anxiously desire to be at peace with all men before I attempt to worship God, lest I present to God the sacrifice of fools.

25, 26. *Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*

In all disagreements be eager for peace. Leave off strife before you begin.

In law-suits, seek speedy and peaceful settlements. Often, in our Lord's days, this was the most gainful way, and usually it is so now. Better lose your rights than get into the hands of those who will only fleece you in the name of justice, and hold you fast so long as a semblance of a demand can stand against you, or another penny can be extracted from you. In a country where "justice" meant robbery, it was wisdom to be robbed, and to make no complaint. Even in our own country, a lean settlement is better than a fat law-suit. Many go into the court to get wool, but come out closely shorn. Carry on no angry suits in courts, but make peace with the utmost promptitude.

27, 28. *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

In this case our King again sets aside the glosses of men upon the commands of God, and makes the law to be seen in its vast spiritual breadth. Whereas tradition had confined the prohibition to an overt act of unchastity, the King shows that it forbade the unclean desires of the heart. Here the divine law is shown to refer, not only to the act of criminal conversation, but even to the desire, imagination, or passion which would suggest such an infamy. What a King is ours, who stretches his scepter over the realm of our inward lusts! How sovereignly he puts it: “But I say unto you”! Who but a divine being has authority to speak in this fashion? His word is law. So it ought to be, seeing he touches vice at the fountain-head, and forbids uncleanness in the heart. If sin were not allowed in the mind, it would never be made manifest in the body: this, therefore, is a very effectual way of dealing with the em. But how searching, how condemning! Irregular looks, unchaste desires, and strong passions are of the very essence of adultery; and who can claim a lifelong freedom from them? Yet these are the things which defile a man. Lord, purge them out of my nature, and make me pure within.

29. *And if thy right eye, offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

That which is the cause of sin is to be given up as well as the sin itself. It is not sinful to have an eye, or to cultivate keen perception; but if the eye of speculative knowledge leads us to offend by intellectual sin, it becomes the cause of evil, and must be mortified. Anything, however harmless, which leads me to do, or think, or feel wrongly? I am to get rid of as much as if it were in itself an evil. Though to have done with it would involve deprivation, yet must it be dispensed with, since even a serious loss in one direction is far better than the losing of the whole man. Better a blind saint than a quick-sighted sinner. If abstaining from alcohol caused weakness of body, it would be better to be weak, than to be strong and fall into drunkenness. Since vain speculations and reasonings land men in unbelief, we will have none of them. To “be cast into

hell” is too great a risk to run, merely to indulge the evil eye of lust or curiosity.

30. *And if thy right hand offend thee, cat it off, and cast it from thee: for it is, profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

The cause of offense may be rather active as the hand than intellectual as the eye; but we had better be hindered in our work than drawn aside into temptation. The most dexterous hand must not be spared if it encourages us in doing evil. It is not because a certain thing may make us clever and successful, that therefore we are to allow it: if it should prove to be the frequent cause of our falling into sin, we must have done with it, and place ourselves at a disadvantage for our life-work, rather than ruin our whole being by sin. Holiness is to be our first object: everything else must take a very secondary place. Right eyes and right hands are no longer right if they lead us wrong. Even hands and eyes must go, that we may not offend our God by them. Yet, let no man read this literally, and therefore mutilate his body, as some foolish fanatics have done. The real meaning is clear enough.

Lord, I love thee better than my, eyes and hands: let me never demur for a moment to the giving up of all for thee!

31, 32. *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: but I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*

This time our King quotes and condemns a permissive enactment of the Jewish State. Men were wont to bid their wives “begone”, and a hasty word was thought sufficient as an act of divorce. Moses insisted upon “a writing of divorcement”, that angry passions might have time to cool, and that the separation, if it must come, might be performed with deliberation and legal formality. The requirement of a writing was to a certain degree a check upon an evil habit, which was so engrained in the people that to refuse it altogether would have been useless, and would only have created another crime. The law of Moses

went as far as it could practically be enforced; it was because of the hardness of their hearts that divorce was tolerated: it was never approved.

But our Lord is more heroic in his legislation. He forbids divorce except for the one crime of infidelity to the marriage-vow. She who commits adulterer does by that act and deed in effect sunder the marriage-bond, and it ought then to be formally recognized by the State as being sundered; but for nothing else should a man be divorced from his wife. Marriage is for life, and cannot be loosed, except by the one great crime which severs its bond, whichever of the two is guilty of it. Our Lord would never have tolerated the wicked laws of certain of the American States, which allow married men and women to separate on the merest pretext. A woman divorced for any cause but adultery, and marrying again, is committing adultery before God, whatever the laws of man may call it. This is very plain and positive; and thus a sanctity is given to marriage which human legislation ought not to violate. Let us not be among those who take up novel ideas of wedlock, and seek to deform the marriage laws under the presence of reforming them. Our Lord knows better than our modern social reformers. We had better let the laws of God alone, for we shall never discover any better.

33-37. *Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the lord thine oaths: but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it ii his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*

False swearing was forbidden of old; but every kind of swearing is forbidden now by the word of our Lord Jesus. He mentions several forms of oath, and forbids them all, and then prescribes simple forms of affirmation or denial, as all that his followers should employ. Notwithstanding much that may be advanced to the contrary, there is no evading the plain sense of this passage, that every sort of oath, however solemn or true, is forbidden to a follower of Jesus. Whether in court of law, or out of it, the rule is, "Swear not at all." Yet, in this Christian country we have swearing everywhere, and especially among law-makers. Our legislators begin their official existence by swearing. By those who obey the law

of the Savior's kingdom, all swearing is set aside, that the simple word of affirmation or denial, calmly repeated, may remain as a sufficient bond of truth. A bad man cannot be believed on his oath, and a good man speaks the truth without an oath: to what purpose is the superfluous custom of legal swearing preserved? Christians should not yield to an evil custom, however great the pressure put upon them; but they should abide by the plain and unmistakable command of their Lord and King.

38. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.*

The law of an eye for an eye, as administered in the proper courts of law, was founded in justice, and worked far more equitably than the more modern system of fines; for that method allows rich men to offend with comparative impunity. But when the lex talionis came to be the rule of daily life, it fostered revenge, and our Savior would not tolerate it as a principle carried out by individuals. Good law in court may be very bad custom in common society. He spoke against whet had become a proverb, and was heard and said among the people: "Ye have heard that it hath been said."

Our loving King would have private dealings ruled by the spirit of love, and not by the rule of law.

39. *But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

Non-resistance and forbearance are to be the rule among Christians. They are to endure personal ill-usage without coming, to blows. They are to be as the anvil when bad men are the hammers, and thus they are to overcome by patient forgiveness. The rule of the judgment-seat is not for common life; but the rule of the cross and the all-enduring Sufferer is for us all. Yet how many regard all this as fanatical, utopian, and even cowardly. The Lord, our King, would have us bear and forbear, and conquer by mighty patience. Can we do it? How are we the servants of Christ if we have not his spirit?

40. *And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let*

him have thy cloak also.

Let him have all he asks, and more. Better lose a suit of cloth than be drawn into a suit in law. The courts Of our Lord's day were vicious; and his disciples were advised to suffer wrong sooner than appeal to them. Our own courts often furnish the surest method of solving a difficulty by authority, and we have known them resorted to with the view of preventing strife. Yet even in a country where justice can be had, we are not to resort to law for every personal wrong. We should rather endure to be put upon than be for ever crying out, "I'll bring an action."

At times this very rule of self-sacrifice may require us to take steps in the way of legal appeal, to stop injuries which would fall heavily upon others; but we ought often to forego our own advantage, yea, always when the main motive would be a proud desire for self-vindication.

Lord, give me a patient spirit, so that I may not seek to avenge myself, oven when I might righteously do so!

41. *And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain,*

Governments in those days demanded forced service through their petty officers. Christians were to be of a yielding temper, and bear a double exaction rather than provoke ill words and anger. We ought not to evade taxation, but stand ready to render to Caesar his due. "Yield" is our watchword. To stand up against force is not exactly our part; we may leave that to others. How few believe the long-suffering, non-resistant doctrines of our King!

42. *Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*

Be generous. A miser is no follower of Jesus. Discretion is to be used in our giving, lest we encourage idleness and beggary; but the general rule is, "Give to him that asketh thee." Sometimes a loan may be more useful than a gift; do not refuse it to those who will make right use of it. These precepts are not meant for fools; they are set before us as our general rule; but each rule is balanced by other Scriptural commands, and there is the teaching of a philanthropic common

sense to guide us. Our spirit is to be one of readiness to help the needy by gift or loan, and we are not exceedingly likely to err by excess in this direction: hence the baldness of the command.

43. *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shall love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.*

In this case a command of Scripture had a human antithesis fitted on to it by depraved mince; and this human addition was mischievous. This is a common method — to append to the teaching of Scripture a something which seems to grow out of it, or to be a natural inference from it: which something may be false and wicked. This is a sad crime against the Word of the Lord. The Holy Spirit will only father his own words. He owns the precept, “Thou shall love thy neighbor”, but he hates the parasitical growth of “hate thine enemy.” This last sentence is destructive of that out of which it appears legitimately to grow; since those who are here styled enemies are, in fact, neighbors. Love is now the universal law; and our King, who has commanded it, is himself the Pattern of it. He will not see it narrowed down, and placed in a setting of hate. May grace prevent any of us from falling into this error!

44, 45. *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Ours it is to persist in loving, even if men persist in enmity. We are to render blessing for cursing, prayers for persecutions. :Even in the cases of cruel enemies, we are to; do good to them, and pray for them.” We are no longer enemies to any, but friends to all. We do not merely cease to hate, and then abide in a cold neutrality; but we love where hatred seemed inevitable. We bless where our old nature bids us curse, and we are active in doing good to those who deserve to receive evil from us. Where this is practically carried out, men wonder, respect, and admire the followers of Jesus. The theory may be ridiculed, but the practice is reverenced, and is counted so surprising, that men attribute it to some Godlike quality in Christians, and own that they are the children of the

Father who is in heaven. Indeed, he is a child of God, who can bless the unthankful and the evil: for in daily providence the Lord is doing this on great scale, and none but his children will imitate him. To do good for the sake of the good done, and not because of the character of the person benefited, is a noble imitation of God. If the Lord only sent the fertilizing shower upon the land of the saintly, drought would deprive whole leagues of land of all hope of a harvest. We also must do good to the evil, or we shall have a narrow sphere, our hearts will grow contracted, and our sonship towards the good God will be rendered doubtful.

46. *For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?*

Any common sort of man will love those who love him; even tax. gatherer and the scum of the earth can rise to this poor, starveling virtue. Saints cannot be content with such a groveling style of things. “Love for love is manlike”; but “love for hate” is Christlike. Shall we not desire to act up to our high calling?

47. *And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so.’*

On a journey, or in the streets, or in the house, we are not to confine our friendly greetings to those who are near and dear to us. Courtesy should be wide, and none the less sincere because general. We should speak kindly to all, and treat every man as a brother. Anyone will shake hands with an old friend; but we are to be cordially courteous towards every being in the form of man. If not, we shall reach no higher level than mere outcasts. Even a dog will salute a dog.

48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

Or, “Ye shall be perfect.” We should reach after completeness in love — fullness of love to all around us. Love is the bond of perfectness; and, if we have perfect love, it will form in us a perfect character. Here is that which we aim at perfection like that of God; here is the manner of obtaining it—namely, by abounding in love; and this suggests the question of how far we have proceeded

in this heavenly direction, and also the reason why we should persevere in it even to the end, because as children we ought to resemble our Father. Scriptural perfection is attainable: it lies rather in proportion than in degree. A man's character may be perfect, and entire, wanting nothing; and yet such a man will be the very first to admit that the grace which is in him is at best in its infancy, and though perfect as a child in all its parts, it has not yet attained to the perfection of full-grown manhood.

What a mark is set before us by our Perfect King, who, speaking from his mountain-throne, saith, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"! Lord, give what thou cost command; then both the grace and the glory will be thine alone.

Matthew 6

1. *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye hate no reward of your Father which is in heaven.*

Our King sets men right as to almsgiving. It is taken for granted that we give to the poor. How could we be in Christ's kingdom if we did not?

Alms may be given publicly, but not for the sake of publicity. It is important that we have a right aim; for if we obtain the result of a wrong aim, our success will be a failure. If we give to be seen, we shall be seen, and there will be an end of it: "Ye have no reward of your father which is in heaven": we lose the only reward worth having. But if we give to please our Father, we shall find our reward at his hands. To the matter of our intent and design we must "take heed"; for nobody goes right without carefully aiming to do so. Our giving of alms should be a holy duty, carefully performed, not for our own honor, but for God's pleasure. Let each reader ask himself, how much he has done, in the way the King prescribes.

2. *Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets. that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto, They have their reward.*

We must not copy the loud charity of certain vainglorious persons: their character is hypocritical, their manner is ostentatious, their aim is to be seen of men, their reward is in the present. That reward is a very poor one, and is soon over. To stand with a penny in one hand and a trumpet in the other is the posture of hypocrisy. "Glory of men" is a thing which can be bought: but honor from God is a very different thing. This is an advertising age, and too many are

saying, “Behold my liberality!” Those who have Jesus for their King must wear his livery of humility, and not the scarlet trappings of a purse-proud generosity, which blows its own trumpet, not only in the streets, but even in the synagogues. We cannot expect two rewards for the same action: if we have it now we shall not have it hereafter. Unrewarded alms will alone count in the record of the last day.

3, 4. *But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.*

Seek secrecy for your good deeds. Do not even see your own virtue. Hide from yourself that which you yourself have done that is commendable; for the proud contemplation of your own generosity may tarnish all your alms. Keep the thing so secret that even you yourself are hardly aware that you are doing anything at all praiseworthy. Let God be present, and you will have enough of an audience. He will reward you, reward you “openly”, reward you as a Father rewards a child, reward you as one who saw what you did and knew that you did it wholly unto him.

Lord, help me, when I am doing good, to keep my left hand out of it, that I may have no sinister motive, and no desire to have a present reward of praise among my fellow-men.

5. *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

Prayer also is taken for granted. No man can be in the kingdom of heaven who does not pray.

Those around our Lord knew what he meant when he alluded to the hypocrites; for they had often Been the proud sectary standing in public places repeating his prayers, and very likely they had hitherto felt bound to hold such in repute for superior sanctity. By our Lord’s words these hypocrites are unmasked, and made

to seem what they really are. Our King was wonderfully plain-spoken, and called both things and persons by their right names. These religionists were not seekers of God, but seekers after popularity; men who twisted even devotion into a means for self aggrandizement. They chose places and times which would render their saying of prayers conspicuous. The synagogues and the corners of the streets suited them admirably; for their aim was “that they may be seen of men.” They were seen. They had what they sought for. This was their reward, and the whole of it.

Lord, let me never be so profane as to pray to thee with the intent of getting praise for myself.

6. *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.*

Be alone; enter into a little room into which no other may intrude; keep out every interloper by shutting the door; and there, and then, with all thy heart pour out thy supplication. “Pray to thy Father”: prayer is mainly to be addressed to God the Father; and always to God as our :Father. Pray to thy Father who is there present, to thy Father who sees thee, and specially takes note of that which is evidently meant for him only, seeing it is done “in secret”, where no eye can see but his own. If it be indeed to God that we pray, there can be no need for anyone else to be present; for it would hinder rather than help devotion to have a third person for witness of the heart’s private intercourse with the Lord.

As the very soul of prayer lies in communion with God, we shall pray best when all our attention is confined to him; and we shall best reach our end of being accepted by him when we have no regard to the opinion of anyone else. Secret prayer is truly heard and openly answered in the Lord’s own way and time. Our King reigns “in secret”: there he sets up his court, and there will he welcome our approaches. We are not where God sees when we court publicity, and pray to obtain credit for our devotion.

7, 8. *But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have*

need of, before ye ask him.

To repeat a form of prayer a very large number of times has always seemed to the ignorantly religious to be a praiseworthy thing; but assuredly it is not so. It is a mere exercise of memory, and of the organs of noise-making: and it is absurd to imagine that such a parrot exercise can be pleasing to the living God. The Mahometans and Papists keep to this heathenish custom; but we must not imitate them.

God does not need us to pray for his information, for he "knoweth what things ye have need of"; nor to repeat the prayer over and over for his persuasion, for as our Father he is willing to bless us. Therefore let us not be superstitious and dream that there is virtue in "much speaking." In the multitude of words, even in prayer, there wanteth not sin.

Repetitions we may have, but not "vain repetitions." Counting beads, and reckoning the time occupied in devotion, are both idle things. Christians' prayers are measured by weight, and not by length. Many of the most prevailing prayers have been as short as they were strong.

9. *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

Our Lord, having warned us against certain vices which had connected themselves with prayer as to its place and spirit, now gives us a model upon which to fashion our prayers. This delightful prayer is short, devout, and full of meaning Its first three petitions are for God and his glory. Our chief prayers to God are to be for his glory. Do we thus begin with God in prayer? Does not the daily bread often come in before the kingdom?

We pray as children to a Father, and we pray as brothers, for we say, "Our Father." "Our Father" is a familiar name, but the words "which art in heaven" suggest the reverence due unto him. Our Father and yet in heaven: in heaven and yet our Father. May his name be treated reverently, and may all that is about him —his Word and his gospel—be regarded with the deepest awe! It is for us so to walk before the Lord in all lowliness, that all shall see that we reverence the character of the thrice-holy One. Then can we truly pray, "Hallowed be thy name", when we hallow it ourselves.

10. *Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as It is in heaven.*

Oh, that thou mayest reign over all hearts and lands! Men have thrown off their allegiance to our Father, God; and we pray with all our might that he may, by his almighty grace, subdue them to loyal obedience. We long for the coming of King Jesus; but meanwhile we cry to our Father, “Thy kingdom come.” We desire for the supreme will to be done in earth, with a cheerful, constant, universal obedience like that of “heaven.” We would have the Lord’s will carried out, not only by the great physical forces which never fail to be obedient to God, but by lovingly active spirits; by men, once rebellious, but graciously renewed. Oh, Oh, that all who say this prayer may display on earth the holy alacrity of obedience which is seen in the happy, hearty, united, and unquestioning service of perfect saints and angels before the throng. Our heart’s highest wish is for God’s honor, dominion, and glory.

11. *Give us this day our daily bread.*

We pray for providential supplies for ourselves and others — “Give us.” We ask for our food as a gift — Give us.” We request no more than bread, or food needful for us. Our petition concerns the day, and asks only for a daily supply; bread enough for this day. We ask not for bread which belongs to others, but only for that which is honestly our own, — “our daily bread.” It is the prayer of a lowly and contented mind, of one who is so sanctified that he waits upon God even about his daily food, and of one who lovingly links others with himself in his sympathy and prayer.

Give me, Lord, both the bread of heaven, and of earth: that which feeds my soul, and sustains my body. For all I look to thee, my Father.

12. *And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*

No prayer of mortal men could be complete without confession of sin. Prayer which does not seek for pardon will fail, as the Pharisee’s prayer did. Let proud men boast as they please, those who are in Christ’s kingdom will always pray, “Forgive us our debts.” Our Lord knew that we should always have debts to own, and therefore would always need to cry, “Forgive! “This is the prayer of men whom the Judge has absolved because of their faith in the Great Sacrifice;

for now to their Father they come for free forgiveness, as children. No man may pass a day without praying “Forgive”; and in his supplication he should not forget his fellow-sinners, but should pray “Forgive us.” The writer ventures to pray, “Lord, forgive me, and my brother over yonder, who says he is perfect.”

This pardon we can only obtain as we freely pass over the offenses of others against ourselves: “as we forgive our debtors.” This is a reasonable, nay, a blessed requirement, which it is a delight to fulfill. It would not be safe for God to forgive a man who will not forgive others.

Lord, I most heartily forgive all who may have done me wrong, I am lenient with those who are indebted to me; and now, with a hopeful heart, I pray thee forgive me, as surer, as I now forgive all who are in and sense my debtors.

13. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

In the course of providence, the Lord tests our graces and the sincerity of our profession; and for this purpose he does “leads us into temptation.” We entreat him not to try us too severely. Lord, let not my joys or my sorrows become temptations to me. As I would not run into temptation of myself, I pray thee, do not lead me where I must inevitably meet it.

But if I must be tried, Lord, deliver me from falling into evil, and specially preserve me from that evil one, who, above all, seeks my soul, to destroy it. Temptation or trial may be for my good, if I am delivered from evil. Lord, do this for me, for I cannot preserve myself.

The prayer finishes with a doxology. That devotion which begins with prayer ends in praise. All rule, and might and honor, belong to God; and to him let them for ever be ascribed. His is “the kingdom”, or the right to rule; “the power”, or the might to uphold his authority; and “the glory”, or the honor that comes out of his government. Our whole heart delights that the Lord is thus supreme and glorious; and therefore we say,

“ Amen.”

How perfect is this model of prayer! So fit for man to pray, so suitable to be laid

before the throng of the Majesty on High. Oh, that we may have grace to copy it all our days! Jesus, our King, will not refuse to present a prayer which is of his own drawing up and is directed to the Father whom he loves to glorify.

14, 15. *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

This enforces Christian action by limiting the power of prayer according to our obedience to the command to forgive. If we would be forgiven, we must forgive: if we will not forgive, we cannot be forgiven. This yoke is easy; this burden is light. It may be a blessing to be wronged, since it affords us an opportunity of judging whether we are indeed the recipients of the pardon which comes from the throne of God. Very sweet is it to pass by other men's offenses against ourselves; for thus we learn how sweet it is to the Lord to pardon us.

16. *Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.*

Having dealt with prayer, our King now instructs us as to fasting. Fasting took a leading place in devotion under the Law, and it might profitably be more practiced even now under the Gospel. The Puritans called it "soul-fattening fasting", and so many have found it. We must, by order of our King, avoid all attempt at display in connection with this form of devotion. Hypocrites went about with faces unwashed, and dolorous, that all might say, "See how rigidly those men are fasting. What good men the, must be!" To look miserable in order to be thought holy- is a wretched piece of hypocrisy; and as it makes fasting into a trick to catch human admiration, it thereby destroys it as a means of grace. We cannot expect to get a reward both from the praise of our fellows and the pleasure of God. We have our choice; and if we snatch at the minor reward, we love the major. May it never be said of us, "They have their reward."

17, 18. *But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee*

openly.

Use diligence to conceal what it would be foolish to parade. Leave off no outward act of personal cleanliness or adornment; “anoint thine head, and wash thy face.” If your fasting is unto God, keep it for him. Act in seasons of extraordinary devotion as you do at other times, that those with whom you come in contact may not know what special devotion you are practicing. You may fast, and that lasting may, be discovered; but let it be no intent of, yours that you should “appear unto men to fast.” Fast from vainglory, ambition, pride, and self-glorification. Fast in secret before the Seer of secrets. Secret fasting shall have an open reward from the Lord; but that which is done out of mere ostentation shall never be reckoned in the books of the Lord. Thus our King has taught us both how to give alms, how to pray, and how to fast; and he will now proceed to legislate for the concerns of daily life.

He would not have his servants seeking two objects, and serving two masters. He calls them away from anxieties about this life to a restful faith in God.

19. *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.*

Lay not out your life for gathering wealth: this would be degrading to you as servants of the heavenly kingdom. It you accumulate either money or raiment, your treasures will be liable to “moth and rust”; and of both you may be deprived by dishonest men. That earthly things decay, or are taken from us, is an excellent reason for not making them the great objects of our pursuit. Hoard not for thieves, gather not for corruption: accumulate for eternity, and send your treasures into the land whither you are going. To live for the sake of growing rich is a gilded death in life.

20. *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through or steal.*

Let our desires and efforts go after heavenly things. These are not liable to any decay within themselves, nor can they be taken from us by force or fraud. Does

not wisdom bid us seek such sure possessions? Out of our earthly possessions that which is used for God is laid up in heaven. What is given to the poor and to the Lord's cause is deposited in the Bank of Eternity. To heaven we are going; let us send our treasures before us. There they will be safe from decay, and robbery: but in no other place may we reckon them to be secure.

Lord, let me be rich towards thee. I had better send on to my treasury in heaven more of my substance than I have already sent. I will at once remember the Church and its Missions, orphans, aged saints, and poor brethren: these are thy treasury boxes, and I will bank my money there.

21. *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

This is a grand moral motive for keeping our desires above groveling objects. The heart must and will go in the direction of that which we count precious. The whole man will be transformed into the likeness of that for which he lives. Where we place our treasures our thoughts will naturally fly It will be wise to let all that we have act as magnets to draw us in the right direction. If our very best things are in heaven, our very best thoughts will fly in the same direction: but if our choicest possessions are of the earth, our heart will be earth-bound.

22, 23. *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.*

The motive is the eye of the soul, and if it be clear, the whole character will be right; but if it be polluted, our whole being will become defiled. The eye of the understanding may also be here understood: if a man does not see things in a right light, he may live in sin and yet fancy that he is doing his duty. A man should live up to his light; but if that light is itself darkness, what a mistake his whole course will be! If our religion leads us to sin, it is worse than irreligion. If our faith is presumption, our zeal selfishness, our prayer formality, our hope a delusion, our experience infatuation, the darkness is so great that even our Lord holds up his hands in astonishment and says — "How great is that darkness! "

Oh, for a single eye to God's glory, a sincere consecration unto the Lord This

alone can fill my soul with light.

24. *No man can serve two masters: for either be will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

Here our King forbids division of aim in life. We cannot have two master passions: if we could, it would be impossible to serve both; their interests would soon come into conflict, and we should be forced to choose between them. God and the world will never agree, and however much we may attempt it, we shall never be able to serve both. Our danger is that in trying to gain money, or in the pursuit of any other object, we should put it out of its place, and allow it to get the mastery of our mind. Gain and godliness cannot both be masters of our souls: we can serve two, but not "two masters." You can live for this world, or live for the next; but to live equally for both is impossible. Where God reigns, the lust of gain must go.

Oh, to be so decided, that we may pursue one thing only! We would hate evil and love God, despise falsehood and hold to truth! We need to know how we are affected both to righteousness and sin; and when this is ascertained to our comfort, we must stand to the right with uncompromising firmness. Mammon is the direct opposite of God as much today as in past ages, and we must loathe its greed, its selfishness, its oppression, its pride; or we do not love God.

25. *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment.'*

"Therefore," in order that our one Master may be served, we must cease from serving self, and from the carking care which self-seeking involves. Read the passage, "Be not anxious for your life." Thought we may take; but anxious, carking care we must not know. Our most pressing bodily wants are not to engross our minds. Our life is more important than the food we eat, or the clothes we wear. God who gives us life will give us bread and raiment. We should much more care how we live than how we eat: the spiritual should go before the bodily, the eternal before the temporal. What we wear is of very small importance compared with what we are. Therefore let us give our chief care to

that which is chief, yea, our sole thought to the one all-absorbing object of all true life, the glory of God.

26. *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?*

The birds are fed by God; will he not feed us? They are free from the fret which comes of hoarding and trading; why should not we be? If God feeds the fowls of the air without sowing, or reaping, or storing, surely he will supply us when we trustfully use these means. For us to rely upon these means and forget our God would be folly indeed. Our King would have his subjects give their hearts to his love and service, and not worry themselves with groveling anxieties. It is well for us that we have these daily wants, because they lead us to our heavenly Father; but if we grow anxious, they are turned from their design and made into barriers to shut us out from the Lord. Oh, that we would be as good as the birds in trustfulness, since in dignity of nature we are so “much better than they”!

27. *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?*

It is a small matter whether we are tall or short; and yet all the worry in the world could not make us an inch taller. Why, then, do we give way to care about things which we cannot alter? If fretting were of any use it would have some excuse; but as it does no good, let us cease from it.

28, 29. *And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

Clothes must not be made much of; for in our finest array, flowers far excel us. We must not be anxious about how we shall be clad; for the field lilies, not under the gardener’s care, are as glorious as the most pompous of monarchs; and yet they enjoy life free from labor and thought. Lovely lilies, how ye rebuke our

foolish nervousness! The array of lilies comes without fret: why do we kill ourselves with care about that which God gives to plants which cannot care?

My Lord, I would grow to thy praise as the lily cloth, and be content to be what thou cost make me, and wear what thou cost give me.

30. *Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

It is not merely that lilies grow, but that God himself clothes them with surpassing beauty, These lilies, when growing, appear only as the grass, commonplace enough; but Solomon could not excel them when God has put them in their full array of cloth of gold. Will he not be sure to take care of us, who are precious in his sight? Why should we be so little trustful as to have a doubt upon that point? If that which is so very short lived is yet so bedecked of the Lord, depend upon it, he will guard immortal minds, and even the mortal bodies with which they are associated.

“Little faith” is not a little fault; for it greatly wrongs the Lord, and sadly grieves the fretful mind. To think the Lord who clothes lilies will leave his own children naked is shameful. O little faith, learn better manners!

31. *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?*

“Be not anxious” is the right interpretation. Think, that you may not have to be anxious. Do not for ever be following the worlds Trinity of cares. The questions in this verse are taken out of the worldlings’ catechism of distrust. The children of God may quietly work on from day to day, and cast all foreboding cares from them;

32. *(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*

We are to excel those who are aliens and foreigners: things which “Gentiles

seek" are not good enough for the Israel of God. The men of the world seek after earthly things, and have no mind for anything beyond: we have a heavenly Father, and therefore we have higher aims and aspirations. Moreover, as our Father knows all about our necessities, we need not be anxious; for he is quite sure to supply all our needs. Let the Gentiles hunt after their many carnal objects; but let the children of the Lord leave their temporal wants with the Lord of infinite grace, and then let them follow after the one thing needful.

Lord, enable me to be a non-anxious one. May I be so eager after heavenly things, that I altogether leave my earthly cares with thee!

33. *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Seek God first, and the rest will follow in due course. As for "all these things", you will not need to seek them; they will be thrown in as a matter of course. God who gives you heaven will not deny you your bread on the road thither. The kingdom of God, and the righteousness suitable to that kingdom—seek these first and foremost, and then all that you can possibly need shall be your portion. To promote the reign of Christ, and to practice righteousness, are but one object; and may that be the one aim of our lives! Let us spend life on the one thing, and it will be well spent: as for the twenty secondary objects, they also will be ours if we pursue the one thing only.

34. *Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the clay is the evil thereof.*

Understand the former verses as the argument to this "therefore." Anxiety cannot help you (verse 27); it is quite useless, it would degrade you to the level of the heathen (verse 32); and there is no need for it (verse 33) — therefore do not forestall sorrow by being anxious as to the future. Our business is with today: we are only to ask breed day by day, and that only in sufficient abundance for the day's consumption. To import the possible sorrows of tomorrow into the thoughts of today is a superfluity of unbelief. When the morrow brings sorrow, it will bring strength for that sorrow. Today will require all the vigor we have to deal with its immediate evils; there can be no need to import cares from the

future. To load today with trials not yet arrived, would be to overload it. Anxiety is evil, but anxiety about things which have not yet happened is altogether without excuse.

“Cast foreboding cares away, God provideth for today.”

O my heart, what rest there is for thee if thou wilt give thyself up to thy Lord, and leave all thine own concerns with him! Mind thou thy Lord’s business, and he will see to thy business.

Matthew 7

1. *Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

Use your judgment, of course: the verse implies that you will judge in a right sense. But do not indulge the criticizing faculty upon others in a censorious manner, or as if you were set in authority, and had a right to dispense judgment among your fellows If you impute motives, and pretend to read hearts, others will do the same towards you. A hard and censorious behavior is sure to provoke reprisals. Those around you will pick up the peck measure you have been using, and measure your corn with it. You do not object to men forming a fair opinion of your character, neither are you forbidden to do the same towards them; but as you would object to their sitting in judgment upon you, do not sit in judgment upon them. This is not the day of judgment, neither are we his Majesty's judges, and therefore we may not anticipate the time appointed for the final assize, nor usurp the prerogatives of the Judge of all the earth.

Surely, if I know myself aright, I need not send my judgment upon circuit to try other men; for I can give it full occupation in my own Court of Conscience to try the traitors within my own bosom.

3-5. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

The judging faculty is best employed at home. Our tendency is to spy out splinters in other men's eyes, and not to see the beam in our own. Instead of beholding, with gratified gaze, the small fault of another, we should act reasonably if we penitently considered the greater fault of ourselves. It is the beam in our own eye which blinds us to our own wrongdoing; but such blindness does not suffice to excuse us, since it evidently does not shut our eyes to the little error of our brother. Officiousness pretends to play the oculist; but in very truth it plays the fool. Fancy a man with a beam in his eye pretending to deal with so tender a part as the eye of another, and attempting to remove so tiny a thing as a mote or splinter! Is he not a hypocrite to pretend to be so concerned about other men's eyes, and yet he never attends to his own? Jesus is gentle, but he calls that man a "hypocrite" who fusses about small things in others, and pays no attention to great matters at home in his own person. Our reformations must begin with ourselves, or they are not true, and do not spring from a right motive. Sin we may rebuke, but not if we indulge it. We may protest against evil, but not if we willfully practice it. The Pharisees were great at censuring, but slow at amending. Our Lord will not have his kingdom made up of hypocritical theorists, he calls for practical obedience to the rules of holiness.

After we are ourselves sanctified, we are bound to be eyes to the blind, and correctors of unholy living; but not till then. Till we have personal piety, our preaching of godliness is sheer hypocrisy. May none of us provoke the Lord to say to us, "Thou hypocrite"!

6. *Give not that which is holy unto the days, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*

When men are evidently unable to perceive the purity of a great truth, do not set it before them. They are like mere dog, and if you set holy things before them they will be provoked to "turn again and rend you": holy things are not for the profane. "Without are dogs": they must not be allowed to enter the holy place. When you are in the midst of the vicious, who are like "swine," do not bring forth the precious mysteries of the faith, for they will despise them, and "trample them under their feet" in the mire. You are not needlessly to provoke attack upon yourself, or upon the higher truths of the gospel. You are not to judge, but you are not to act without judgment. Count not men to be dogs or swine; but when they avow themselves to be such, or by their conduct act as if they were such, do

not put occasions in their way for displaying their evil character. Saints are not to be simpletons; they are not to be judges, but, also, they are not to be fools.

Great King, how much wisdom thy precepts require! I need thee, not only to open my mouth, but also at times to keep it shut.

7, 8. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

To men you may not always speak of heavenly things, but to God you may.

"Ask, seek, knock"; let your prayer be adapted to the case; let it increase in intensity; let it advance in the largeness of its object. To receive a gift is simple, to find a treasure is more enriching, to enter into a palace is best of all. Each form of prayer is prescribed, accepted, and rewarded in a manner suitable to its character. The promise is universal to all who obey the precept. The commands are in opposition to the methods of carking care which have been denounced in the former chapter; and they are encouragements to the precepts of giving and non-resistance set forth previously, since he that can have of God for the asking may well give to men who ask, and even yield to those who unjustly demand. With such boundless stores at command, we should not be either niggardly or litigious. Lord, help me to have done with fretting, and to abound in asking, seeking, knocking; so shall I soon overflow with thanksgiving.

9, 10. *Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?*

In temporal things we make blunders, and ask for that as bread which we think to be so, when in truth it is a stone. We mistake a serpent for an eel, and beg for it as for a fish. Our heavenly Father will correct our prayer, and give us, not what we ignorantly seek, but what we really need. The promise to give what we ask is here explained, and set in its true light. This is a gracious correction of the folly which would read the Lord's words in the most literal sense, and make us dream that every whim of ours had only to put on the dress of prayer in order to its realization. Our prayers go to heaven in a Revised Version. It would be a terrible thing if God always gave us all we asked for. Our heavenly Father himself

“knows how to give” far better than we know how to ask.

11. *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*

We, although ourselves evil, correct our children’s blunders in their requests to us, and much more will our all-wise, and good, heavenly Father amend in his bestowals the errors of our beseechings. He will give the good which we did not ask, and withhold the ill which we so unwisely requested. We know our children and know for our children; and yet we are poor, evil creatures: shall not the perfectly good Father, who knows all things, arrange his gifts most graciously? Yes, we are sure he will. “How much more”! says our Lord, and he does not say how much more, but leaves that to our meditations. We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but he knows how to give as becometh his perfection; and he will do so. He will give “good things”, and especially his Holy Spirit, who is all good things in one. Lord, I would think more of Thee than of my own prayer; more of thy Son than of my own faith; and more of thy Holy Spirit than of all good gifts beside.

12. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*

Everything that has gone before leads up to this, and argues for it, and so he says “therefore.” It will be instructive to look back, and think this out. Let my reader set about it.

In this place our King gives us HIS GOLDEN RULE. Put yourself in anther’s place, and then act to him as you would wish him to act towards you under the same circumstances. This is a right royal rule, a precept always at hand, always applicable, always right. Here you may be a judge, and yet not be judging others, but judging for others. This is the sum of the Decalogue, the Pentateuch, and the whole sacred Word.

Oh, that all men acted on it, and then there would be no slavery, no war, no sweating, no striking, no lying, no robbing; but all would be justice and love! What a kingdom is this which has such a law! This is The Code Christian. This

is the condensation of all that is right and generous. We adore the King out of whose mouth and heart such a law could flow. This one rule is a proof of the divinity of our holy religion. The universal practice of it by all who call themselves Christians would carry conviction to Jew, Turk, and infidel, with greater speed and certainty than all the apologies and arguments which the wit or piety of men could produce.

Lord, teach it to me! Write it on the fleshy tablets of my renewed heart! Write it out in full in my life!

13, 14. *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

Be up and on your journey. Enter in at the gate at the head of the way, and do not stand hesitating. If it be the right road, you will find the entrance somewhat difficult, and exceedingly narrow; for it demands self-denial, and calls for strictness of obedience, and watchfulness of spirit. Nevertheless, "enter ye in at the strait gate." Whatever its drawbacks of fewness of pilgrims, or straitness of entrance, yet choose it, and use it. True, there is another road, broad and much frequented; but it leadeth to destruction. Men go to ruin along the turnpike-road, but the way to heaven is a bridle-path. There may come other days, when the many will crowd the narrow way; but, at this time, to be popular one must be broad —broad in doctrine, in morals, and in spirituals. But those on the strait road shall go straight to glory, and those on the broad road are all abroad. All is well that ends well: we can afford to be straitened in the right way rather than enlarged in the wrong way; because the first endeth in endless life, and the second hastens down to everlasting death.

Lord, deliver me from the temptation to be "broad", and keep me in the narrow way though few find it!

15. *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

We have need of our judgments, and we must try the spirits of those who profess

to be sent of God. There are men of great gifts who are “false prophets” These affect the look, language, and spirit of God’s people, while really they long to devour souls, even as wolves thirst for the blood of sheep. “Sheep’s clothing” is all very fine, but we must look beneath it and spy out the wolves. A man is what he is inwardly. We had need beware. This precept is timely at this hour. We must be careful not only about our way, but about our leaders. They come to us; they come as prophets; they come with every outward commendation; but they are very Balaams, and will surely curse those they pretend to bless.

16. *Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*

Their teaching, their living, and their effect upon our minds will be a sure test to us. Every doctrine and doctrinaire may thus be tried. If we gather grapes of them, they are not thorns: if they produce nothing but thistle-down, they are not fig-trees. Some object to this practical method of test; but wise Christians will carry it with them as the ultimate touchstone. What is the effect of modern theology upon the spirituality, the prayerfulness, the holiness of the people? Has it any good effect?

17, 18. *Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

Every man produces according to his nature; he cannot do otherwise. Good tree, good fruit; corrupt tree, evil fruit. There is no possibility of the effect being higher and better than the cause. The truly good does not bring forth evil; it would be contrary to its nature. The radically bad never rises to produce good, though it may seem to do so. Therefore the one and the other may be known by the special fruit of each. Our King is a great teacher of prudence. We are not to judge; but we are to know, and the rule for this knowledge is as simple as it is safe. Such knowledge of men may save us from great mischief which would come to us through associating with bad and deceitful persons.

19. *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

Here is the end to which evil things, are tending. The ax and the fire. await the ungodly, however fine they may look with the leafage of profession. Only let time enough be given, and every man on earth who bears no good fruit will meet his doom. It is not merely the wicked, the bearer of poison berries, that will be cut down; but the neutral, the man who bears no fruit of positive virtue must also be cast into the fire.

20. *Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

It is not ours to how or to burn; but it is ours to know. This knowledge is to save us from coming under the shadow or influence of false teachers. Who wants to build his nest upon a tree which is soon to be cut down? Who would choose a barren tree for the center of his orchard?

Lord, let me remember that I am to judge myself by this rule. Make me a true fruit-bearing tree.

21. *Not every one that saith unto me, lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

No verbal homage will suffice: “Not every one that saith.” We may believe in our Lord’s Deity, and we may take great pains to affirm it over and over again with our “Lord, Lord”; but unless we carry out the commands of the Father, we pay no true homage to the Son. We may own our obligations to Jesus, and so call him “Lord, Lord”; but if we never practically carry out those obligations, what is the value of our admissions? Our King receives not into his kingdom those whose religion lies in words and ceremonies; but only those whose lives display the obedience of true discipleship.

22, 23. *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

An orthodox creed will not save if it stands alone, neither will it be sure to do so

if accompanied by official position and service. These people said, “Lord, Lord”; and, in addition, pleaded their prophesying or preaching in his name. All the preaching m the world will not save the preacher if he does not practice. Yes, and he may have been successful, — successful to a very high degree, “are in thy name have cast out devils”, and yet, without personal holiness, the casterout of devils will be cast out himself. The success boasted of may have had about it surprising circumstances of varied interest — “and in thy name done many wonderful works”; and yet the man may be unknown to Christ. Three times over the person is described as doing all “in thy name”; and yet the Lord, whose name he used so freely, so boldly, knew nothing of him, and would not suffer him to remain in his company. The Lord cannot endure the presence of those who call him “Lord, Lord”, and then work iniquity. They professed to him that they knew him; but he will “profess unto them, I never knew you.”

How solemn is this reminder to me, and to others! Nothing will prove us to be true Christians but a sincere doing of the Father’s will! We may be know by all to have great spiritual power over devils, and men, and yet our Lord may not own us in that great day; but may drive us out as impostors whom he cannot tolerate in his presence.

24, 25. *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*

We are to hear our Lord; and by this is, of course, intended that we are to accept what he says as authoritative: this is more than some do at this time, for they sit in judgment upon the teachings of. the Lord. But hearing is not enough; we must do these sayings. There must be practical godliness, or nothing is right within us. The doing hearer has built a house with a stable foundation: the wisest and safest, but the most expensive and toilsome thing to do. Trials come to him. His sincerity and truthfulness do not prevent his being tested. From above, and from beneath, and from all sides, the trials come: rain, floods and wind. No screen is interposed: all these “beat upon the house.” It is a substantial structure; but the tests become so severe that nothing can save the building unless it be the strength of its foundation. Because the chief support is so immovable the entire

erection survives. “It fell not”: it may have suffered damage here and there, and it may have looked very weather-beaten; but “it fell not.” Let the Rock of Ages be praised if, after terrible tribulation, it can be said of our faith, “it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.”

26, 27. *And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the flood” came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.*

The mere hearer is in a poor plight. He, too, is a house-builder. The hearing of the Lord’s sayings sets him upon work, and work which is designed to afford him shelter and comfort. He “built his house”: he was practical and persevering, and did not begin and leave off before completion. Yet though he was industrious, he was foolish. No doubt he built quickly, for his foundation cost him no severe labor; his excavations were soon made, for there was no rock to remove: he “built his house upon the sand.” But trials come even to insincere professors. Are we not all born to trouble? The same kind of afflictions come to the foolish as come to the wise, and they operate in precisely the same way; but the result is very different.

“It fell.” These are solemn words. It was a fine building, and it promised to stand for ages; but “it fell.” There were minor faults in the fabric, but its chief weakness was underground, in the secret place of the foundation: the man “built his house upon the sand.” His fundamentals were wrong.

The crash was terrible; the sound was heard afar: “great was the fall of it.” The overflow was final and irretrievable. Many heard the fall, and many more saw the ruins as they remained a perpetual memorial of the result of that folly which is satisfied with hearing, and neglects doing.

28, 29. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

The sermon is over; what has come of it? Never was there so great a Preacher, and never did he deliver a greater discourse: how many were the penitents? How many the converts? We do not hear of any. Divine truth, even when preached to perfection, will not of itself affect the heart to conversion. The most overpowering authority produces no obedience unless the Holy Ghost subdue the hearer's heart.

"The people were astonished": was this all? It is to be feared it was. Two things surprised them; the substance of his teaching, and the manner of it. They had never heard such doctrine before; the precepts which he had given were quite new to their thoughts. But their main astonishment was at his manner: there was a certainly a power, a weight about it, such as they had never seen in the ordinary professional instructors. He did not raise questions, nor speak with hesitation; neither did he cite authorities, and hide his own responsibility behind great names. "He taught them as one having authority." He spoke royally: the truth itself was its own argument and demonstration. He taught prophetically, as one inspired from above: men felt that he spake after the manner of one sent of God. It was no fault on their part to be astonished, but it was a grave crime to be astonished and nothing more.

My Savior, this was a poor reward for thy right royal discourse — "The people were astonished." Grant to me that I may not care to astonish people, but may I be enabled to win them for thee: and if, with my utmost endeavors. I do astonish them, and nothing more, may I never complain; for how should the disciple be above his Lord?

Matthew 8

1. *When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him.*

Curiosity drew the crowd. Our Lord was popular; but he never prized this popularity for its own sake. He was too wise to think much of that which is so fickle a thing. Yet we are glad to see multitudes gathered to hear the Word, for good may come of it. Jesus came down to lift the multitudes up.

2. *And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

This verve begins with a “behold.” It was not wonderful that great multitudes came to Jesus; but it was a marvel that a leper should believe that he could remove an incurable disease. The leper rendered to Christ divine homage; and if Jesus had been merely a good man, and nothing more, he would have refused the worship with holy indignation. Those who call Jesus “Lord”, and do not worship him, are more diseased than the leper was. His was a high degree of faith; for, so far as we know, no one had previously believed in Jesus in this fashion. Leprosy breeds great despair; but this poor creature rose superior to all doubt: if Jesus willed it, even he might be healed.

He did not doubt the Savior’s will when he said, “Lord, if thou toils.” Nay rather, he so believed in our Lord’s power, that he felt that he had but to exorcise his will, and the cure would be effected at once. Have we as much faith as this? Are we convinced that the mere will of Jesus would make us whole?

Lord, I can and do go as far as this, and farther still.

3. *And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed.*

Anyone else would have been defiled by touching a leper; but the healing power in Jesus repelled pollution. He touches us by the finger of his humanity, but he is not thereby defiled. His touch proves his condescension, his sympathy, his fellowship. It was no accidental touch: “Jesus put forth his hand.” Our Lord has come to us by his own act and effort: he was determined to come to us in all our loathsomeness and pollution. After the touch came the word: “I will.” One has well observed that Jesus never says, “I will not.” He wills, whether ether we will or not. “Be thou clean” was the royal word of one conscious of abundant power. What a. work, to cleanse a leper! Yet it is easy enough to our King, seeing he is divine: else unbelief would be most reasonable.

With what pleasure Jesus spake! With what joy the leper heard! With what curiosity the bystanders looked on! They had not to wait: the miracle followed the word without a moment’s delay. The cure was instantaneous. He spake, and it was done. Our King’s having left his throne to stand side by side with leper was the greatest of all miracles; and after that we wonder not that other miracles sprang out of it.

4. *And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

Our Lord would not increase his own reputation. He sought no honor of men, and he did not wish to swell the crowds which, even now, made it almost impossible for him to go about his work. He sought usefulness, and not fame. It would have been hard for the leper to have held his tongue, but he ought to have done so when bidden. Be it ours to speak, or to be silent, as our Lord requires.

The old law stood, and our Lord would have it honored while it lasted; therefore the healed leper must go to the priest, present his offering, and get from the proper official a certificate of health. Besides, he would thus be bearing witness to the nation that there was One among them who could cure the leprosy. The man was clean, and yet he must go to be ceremonial!, cleansed. After we have the thing signified by an ordinance, we are not, therefore, to forego the sign, but

the rather to attend to it with care. How prudent was it on the part of our Lord not to remove ancient regulations till the full time had come for the introduction of the new!

5-7. *And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.*

A Gentile approaches our King — a soldier, one of Israel's oppressors; and our Lord receives him with an "I will", even as he had received the leper. This Roman officer came about his slave-boy. It is good for masters to be concerned for their servants, especially when they are sick. It is best of all when they go to Jesus about their servants, as this centurion did. The boy was at his master's house: he had not packed him off because he was ill. The kind master watched his servant's bed, and he sympathetically describes what he had seen. He seeks a cure, but does not prescribe to the Lord how or where he shall work it: in fact, he does not put his request into words, but pleads the case, and lets the sorrow speak. That the youth is "grievously tormented" is mentioned as an argument to move our Lord to pity. One does not often see palsy and acute pain united; but the watchful centurion had marked these symptoms, and he pleads them with Jesus. Not merit, but misery, must be our plea with the Savior.

Our Lord needed very little beseeching. He promptly said, "I will come and heal him." Lord, say this to us concerning those for whom we lovingly intercede!

8, 9. *The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*

He would not put the Lord Jesus to so much trouble as to come to his house. He felt unworthy to be served at such a cost by such a Lord. He argues that a word will do it all. He was under authority himself, and hence his power to exercise

authority over others. He believed that the Lord Jesus had a commission also from the supreme power, and that this would gird him with command over all the minor forces of the universe, a command which he could exercise from a distance with a single word. If soldiers would come and go at a centurion's bidding, much more would diseases fly at the word of the Lord Jesus. It was a thoughtful argument, but it was fair and conclusive. May we also know Jesus under authority, Jesus with authority, and ourselves under authority to Jesus! May we also believe in the omnipotence of the divine word, and go forth and prove its power in the hearts of men! O thou, who art our King, display thy royal power!

10. *When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.*

Jesus marvelled to see any man believe; for men are incredulous by nature. He rejoices to see a far-off one believe; for, alas! the favored hearers are slow to trust him. He marvels at a soldier, an officer, having so much faith. Jesus did not praise the centurion to his face, but what he spoke "he said to them that followed." Avoid fattering young converts. Learn, from what our Lord said, that he looks out for faith; that he looks for it among hearers of the Word; that he usually does not find it; but that, when he does, it may be so great as to astonish him. Great faith may grow where there is little soil, and no faith where everything seemed to promise and promote it. Great faith is very dear to the Lord Jesus; but he marvels when he sees it, for it is so rare.

11, 12. *And I say unto you. That many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Heaven will be filled. If the likely ones will not come, the unlikely ones shall do so. Many beloved ones are there already, a sort of nucleus to which we gather, even as Israel gathered to "Abraham, and Isaac, and.Jacob." From "east and west" great multitudes shall come, undeterred by distance; and these shall share the same heaven as do the patriarchs of old. How sad to think that the

descendants of those patriarchs shall be cast out like refuse, thrown behind the wall in the dark, and left in the cold to gnash their teeth in anguish! What a turning of things upside down! The nearest cast out, and the furthest made nigh! How often is this the case! The centurion comes from the camp to Christ, and the Israelite goes from the synagogue to hell. The harlot bows at Jesus' feet a penitent, while the self-righteous Pharisee rejects the great salvation. Oh, that this incident may sweetly persuade us to believe greatly; and may none of us doubt the power of the incarnate Son of God!

13. *And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.*

In the words, "Go thy way", we see that, oftentimes, a return to our usual duties, and our habitual calm of mind, may be the best proof that our faith has apprehended the promised blessing. Why should he linger who has obtained all he sought? Rather let him go home, and enjoy the fruit of his success in prayer. The Lord often gives in proportion to faith. "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee", is a word by which we are allowed to bring our own measure and set the standard of blessing which we would possess. Our Lord spoke the word as the centurion desired. The result was immediate and complete: not only was life spared, but health restored. Many a time prolonged prayer is but muttering unbelief; and to go about one's business would be to take the Lord at his word, and honor his veracity.

14. *And when Jesus was come into Peter’s house, he saw his wife’s mother laid, and sick of a fever.*

It was a feverish place. Piety does not make unsanitary places healthy. Peter had a wife: let the so-called successors of Peter remember that fact. His wife’s mother took the fever: holiness does not secure immunity from disease. This mother-in-law was a specially good woman, for she was allowed to live with her son-in-law, and he was anxious to have her restored to health. The Lord Jesus saw the sick one, for, he was not put away in a back-room, and he was not careful to keep away from the contagious disorder. Jesus feared no fever.

Our Lord sees all our sick ones, and herein lies our hope for their recovery.

15. *And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them.*

Our Lord was entreated by her friends, and therefore took her hand, and by a touch recovered her. The first miracle in this chapter was by a touch, the second by a word, and now this by a touch again: it is all one to Jesus. The cure was instantaneous. It was a very complete cure. We expect to read that the fever left her very weak; but our Lord's cures are always perfect ones. She felt active enough to rise, energetic enough to work, and we need hardly add, grateful enough to wait upon her Physician, and all his friends. No proof of recovery from the fever of sin is more sure than the holy earnestness of the healed ones to do works meet for thankfulness towards him who has restored them.

16. *When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.*

Our Lord made long days: set of sun was not the setting of his power. Wise persons brought their sick within the circle of his presence, as soon as the Sabbath was ended. His power cowed forth at once. He lived in a hospital, and it was a hospital of incurables, which contained "many" distressing cases: yet in no case was he overmatched. He dispossessed the devils who possessed poor men and women; not only calling them out, but "casting them out" with a divine violence. As for sicknesses, nothing came amiss to him; he "healed all that were sick." The Kingly One battled with legions of foes, and readily overcame them all. What were demons or diseases to the omnipotent Lord? His Word is still Almighty.

17. *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses.*

His deeds of healing proved his living sympathy with men. Becoming man, he reckoned man's infirmities to be his infirmities. He looked on men's ills as if they were his own, and did not delay a moment to remove them. Moreover, the cure cost him much as to his corporeal frame, which was loaded with the burden of human woe. Virtue, as it went forth from him, made a drain upon his system;

and thus, while his strength went forth to men, their weaknesses seemed to come back upon himself. He bowed his back beneath our burden, and thus raised it from those shoulders which had been crushed to the earth by it.

O Lord, let me never forget what a brother thou art, and how surely thy help of us proves that thou cost truly share our griefs!

18. *Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about him, he gave commandment to depart unto the other side.*

He ran away from popularity. Having healed all that were sick, the royal Physician sought to begin practice on fresh ground. He saw the crowds becoming dangerous, and perhaps too enthusiastic, and so he took ship for the further shore to be away from their rash acts. Too often we court the notoriety which our Lord avoided. Is it not because we are swayed by inferior motives, which had no power over him? We ought not to keep to the side where we get flattery, but we should “depart unto the other side” to begin fresh work. Moreover, “the other side” may be the side which needs us most, and it is right even to leave a multitude which have had their share of privilege to go to a smaller company who have had no time of gracious opportunity.

19, 20. *And a certain scribe came, and said unto him, Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*

Was this scribe charmed by what he heard and saw of our Lord? We think so. In a sudden fit of enthusiasm, he calls him “Master.” He had probably hurried round the shore after Jesus, and he declares he will always follow him, let the Master go where he may. His is an unreserved discipleship which knows no time or place: “I will follow tines whithersoever thou goest.” His was an unasked-for following, for the Lord had not said to him, “Follow me.” It was the best fruit of nature, but not the result of grace. Our King soon tests this loudly-expressed loyalty, by telling the new convert that he was so poor a master, that beasts of the fields, and “birds of the air”, were better off for lodgings than himself. If the leader fared so badly, there was a poor look-out for the follower. How great was the humiliation of our Lord and King! He had no palace, and no silken canopy.

He who was our Head had not where to lay his own head.

Did this scribe have his name inscribed among the poor scholars of a homeless teacher? We do not know. How stands it in our case? Can we follow a penniless cause? Can we proclaim a despised doctrine?

21. *And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*

The first man was too fast, the second was too slow. This person was a disciple: Jesus sent him on a mission; he was not ready to start. He must do something else first. That something had to do with a dead relative. It was a grave fault to put the sepulcher before the Savior. His father would be sure to be buried by some other member of the family; but no other could obey the command of Christ which this disciple had received. We may leave work which another can do when our Lord appoints us a peculiar personal service. It must be Christ first, and father next. Living commands must take precedence of duties to the dead. Soldiers cannot be excused from war on account of domestic claims.

22. *But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.*

Our Lord repeated his command, “Follow me.” Others could bury the dead; it was for the disciple to obey his orders. Men who are unrenewed are dead, and they are quite able to attend to such dead business as a funeral. Much of the concerns of politics, party tactics, committee meetings, social reforms, innocent amusements, and so forth, may be very fitly, described as burying the dead. Much of this is very needful, proper, and commendable work; but still only such a form of business as unregenerate men can do as well as the disciples of Jesus. Let them do it; but if we are called to preach the gospel, let up give ourselves wholly to our sacred calling. Let not the higher worker entangle himself with what worldlings can do quite as well as he can. “Follow me” is a precept which will need all our powers to carry it out; but by grace we will obey.

23. *And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him.*

They were wise to follow him, and safe in so doing; but they were not therefore secure from trial. In the boat with Jesus is a happy place, but storms may come even when we are there.

24. *And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep.*

This inland lake was subject to sudden squalls and tempests, wherein the wind raged so as to lift the boat fairly out of the water. This was an unusually bad storm: the little ship seemed lost: the wing of the tempest covered it. The comfort was that Christ was in the vessel, and his presence covered the boat, as surely as did the waves. Yet the presence of our great Lord will not prevent our being tossed by “a great tempest.”

25. *And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish.*

He was not flurried: his trust in his great Father was so firm, that, rocked in the cradle of the deep, he slept peacefully. Winds howled, and waters dashed over him; but he slept on. His disciples caused him more disquiet than the storm. They “awoke him” with their cries. They were mistrustful, and ready to upbraid him with indifference. Little faith prayed, “Save us”; much fear cried, “We perish.” Men in a storm cannot be very select in their language, but they learn to be very earnest and eager The appeal of these disciples may suit many. Here was reverence for Jesus — “Lord”: an intelligent supplication — “save us”; and an overwhelming argument — “we perish.”

26. *And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.*

He spoke to the men first, for they were the most difficult to deal with: wind and sea could be rebuked afterwards. He questions the disciples. Alas, they had questioned him in an unworthy sense! There is no reason in our unbelief. That “Why?” is unanswerable. If we are right in having any faith, we must be wrong in having any fear. Little faith, from one point of view, is most precious; but

under another aspect it is most unjustifiable. Why “little faith” in a great God? It is well that it is faith; it is ill that it is little.

See the Lord rise from his hard couch. In royal dignity he lifts up himself. A word makes a calm. As it was a great tempest, now he gives “a great calm”: there was nothing little in the whole business, except the disciples’ faith. When our Lord rebuked the winds, he did in the best manner rebuke their unbelief. He has very happy ways of correcting us by the greatness of His mercy to us.

My soul, thou knowest what that “great calm” is; henceforth exercise a great faith in the great Peace-maker. Be sure to have that faith when thou art caught in a great tempest.

27. *But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!*

It was well that they wondered; it would have been better had they adored. If Christ had been only man, the wonder about him would have been beyond all wonderment. He was divine, and hence to his royal word all nature yielded. This is the end of the wonder of the intellect, but it is the beginning of the worship of the heart. In this case, our glorious King for the moment unveiled his glory, and commanded obedience from the most boisterous of the elements. In our own cases how often have we had to cry out, “What manner of man is this!” How grandly has he brought us through terrible storms! How easily has he calmed the surges of our souls! Blessed be his name! Still “the winds and the sea obey him.”

28. *And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way.*

Did they come out to oppose him? As he steps on the shore, did Satan mean to drive him back by this double legion of demons? The tombs were Satan’s castle; he used the madness of these afflicted men as his weapons of war. They had driven away everybody else; will they stop the advance of the Lord Jesus? They were “exceeding fierce”: will they fright him to flight?

29. *And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?*

This is the old cry, “Mind your own business! Do not interfere with our trade! Let us alone, and go elsewhere!” Devils never like to be interfered with. But if devils have nothing to do with Jesus, he has something to do with them. His presence is torment to them. They know that a time is coming when they shall fully receive their hell; but that time seems to be antedated when the Lord Jesus invades their solitary, lurking-place among the tombs. The devils here spoke, and compelled the lips of the men thus to plead against themselves. How very like is this to the swearer’s case, whose mouth is used to imprecate a curse upon himself! The devils owned him Son of God, for even they are not so base as to deny his Deity. The demons confessed that he was not under their rule: “What have we to do with thee?” They also expressed their dread of his almighty power, and feared the torment they deserved.

30, 31. *And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.*

Jews had no right to be feeding herds of swine, for they were unclean to them. The devils began to tremble before Jesus had said a word, “saying,

If thou cast us out.” They cannot bear to go to their own place, and so beg to go into pigs. Devils would sooner dwell inside swine than be in the presence of Jesus. If they cannot do mischief to men, they would sooner destroy pigs than be without doing mischief. Devils cannot, however, even afflict hogs without leave from Christ. Think of these demons in their pride beseeching Jesus, and beseeching him for so small a boon as to be allowed to enter into a herd of swine. Truly the Son of God is King! The whines of a legion of devils admit his sovereignty.

32. *And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.*

Our Lord never wastes words on devils: “He said unto them, Go.” The less we say to bad men the better. One word is enough for such dogs as these tormenting spirits were. The devils soon went from the lunatics to the hogs. From a madman to a beast was a short remove for a foul spirit. Swine prefer death to deviltry; and if men were not worse than swine, they would be of the same opinion. They run hard whom the devil drives. The devil drives his hogs to a bad market. Those who pursue a downward path without consideration, will come to destruction in the end. The swine “perished in the water”, but the devils are reserved to the judgment of eternal fire. We need not dread the powers of hell. They fly pell-mell before our Lord.

33. *And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told every thing, and what was befallen to the possessed of the devils.*

Well might the swineherds flee! When evil men perish at the last, their wicked pastors will have a hard time of it.

How vividly they told their story! No item was left out! “They told everything.” Probably all the details were brought out into exaggerated relief. Thus would they excuse their own loss of the swine which they were set to keep, but had seen lost before their very eyes. Their employers, the owners of the herd, must have greatly lamented their loss, but they must have trembled as they saw the hand of God in it. What a crushing misfortune for the swine-keepers. of Gadara! Who pities them, since their trade was unlawful! The story of the healing of the demoniacs was mentioned by the reporters as a secondary matter; but, indeed, it was the central point of the narrative. To some men souls are secondary to swine. The healing of the two demoniacs added to the wonder, and set every ear tingling throughout the city. Yet the result on the people was not what one would have expected.

34. *And, behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coast.*

A rare occurrence a whole city meeting Jesus, and that city unanimous in their appeal to him. Alas, it was the unanimity of evil! Here was a whole city at a prayer-meeting, praying against their own blessing. Think of having the Lord among them, healing the worst of diseases, and yet entreating him to go away

from them! They would be rid of the one glorious Being who alone could bless them. Horrible was their prayer; but it was heard, and Jesus departed out of their coasts. He will not force his company on any. He will be a welcome guest, or he will be gone. What a mercy that our Lord does not hear every prayer of this sort! How would it fare with swearers if their imprecations were fulfilled?

O Lord, I thank thee that thou didst not go away from me, when I, in my unregenerate condition. Wished thee to let me alone!

Matthew 9

1. *And he entered into a ship, and passed over and came into his own city.*

Many times he crossed the lake of Galilee; but this time, more in sadness than in anger, he left a people behind him who had prayed him to depart. He had made Capernaum his own city by the privileges wherewith he had exalted it. What a name! “His own city.” It was its highest honor that he came sailing into its port, even he who was Lord High Admiral of all seas. Yet the favored city refused him, and knew not its day. May none of us be thus favored, and prove thus unworthy!

2. *And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy ; Son, be of good cheer thy sins be forgiven thee.*

Here our King displays his power over weakness. The man is sad and paralyzed; the weight of sin is on his conscience, and his body is in bonds. Yet he has good friends, who band themselves together, and four of them carry him up to the roof of the house wherein our Lord is preaching, and let him down, in his bed, by ropes. They have faith in Jesus, and so has he; and the Lord answers to their faith with a cheering word, in which he called him “child.” How sweet a word for a young man, and for one so feeble! His mental distress was the hardest to suffer, and our Lord removed it with a word. Perhaps the youth’s sin had some connection with his palsy, and hence his double distress. None but Jesus could pardon sin; but with a royal word he pronounced effectual absolution. This he gave first, because most longed for by the paralytic, because the greatest boon, because the evil it removed lies at the root of every other, and because he thus unveiled his majesty, and had an opportunity to instruct opposers. How the youth’s face brightened as he felt the comfort of that effectual forgiveness! He

could not as yet walk, but he felt more happy than tongue could tell. “thy sins be forgiven thee” is a note which never fails to bring “good cheer” to the saddest heart.

3. *And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth.*

They were afraid to speak out, but “said within themselves.” Each one of these law-writers felt a bitter feeling towards the Lord Jesus, and by their looks they conspired in the charge against him. They did not call him “man”; the word is in italics in our version. They did not know what to call him even in their hearts: they meant — “this” — this upstart, this nobody, this strange being, who is so great that we fear him, so good that we hate him. They were blaspheming him by their agnosticism, and yet these blasphemers charged the Lord with blasphemy. Yet, supposing our Lord to be only a man, they were right. Pardon of sin is the sole prerogative of God: who dares to usurp it?

I know that none but God can forgive; yet Jesus has forgiven me, and in so doing he did not blaspheme, for he is most truly God.

4. *And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?*

He is the great thought-reader. Just now we met with the expression, “seeing their faith”, and now we read, “knowing their thoughts.” He puts the questioners to the question. His whys and wherefores go to the root of the matter. We are responsible for secret thoughts, and the Lord will one day call us to account concerning them. Accusations against Jesus are always unreasonable, and when fairly faced are put to silence. It would be well if many of our Lord’s enemies today could be brought to ponder the question, “Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts” What is the cause of it? What is the good of it? Why not cease from it?

5. *For whether is easier, to say. Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say Arise, and walk?*

He answers their evil thoughts by a question which was to them unanswerable.

Surely the two things are equally beyond human power to work. But to say “Thy sins be forgiven thee”, is the easier to all appearance, because no apparent result is expected to follow by which the reality of the speech can be tested. Thousands have pretended to absolve a man from sin, who would not have dared to command a disease to disappear. The difference in merely saying is all in favor of the first speech. If we compare the two miracles, it would be long before one could arrive at an answer as to which is the easier; for they are both impossible with men. In some respects the pardon of sin is the greater work of the two, for its accomplishment requires the whole apparatus of incarnation and atonement. Our Lord wrought both miracles, and thus confirmed his claim of power by a visible sign which none could question.

He that can pardon my soul can heal my body; for that would seem to be the easier of the two deeds of mercy. I may bring both forms of malady to Jesus, and he will deal with them. Lord, heal my spirit and cure my flesh! Yea, thou wilt do this work most effectually by raising my body incorruptible as thine own.

6. *But that ye may know that the Sin of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.*

The second part of the miracle was for the silencing of those caviling scribes: “That ye may know.” Did they ever come to this knowledge? The case was made clear for them, but they would not see it. Jesus, “the Son of man”, was yet “on earth”; but in his lowly condition he had authority and power to forgive sins against God, for he was God. He would prove that he had “power on earth “by healing the paralytic. By exerting what they thought the greater power, he would prove his possession of the less. He bide the man “Arise”, or bestir himself. He further says, “take up thy bed”, or roll up your mat, and lift it to your shoulders, and then “walk.” Thus would the obedient patient, by the free use of his limbs, prove himself to be wholly recovered. This was a great word to speak; but he, who had already received pardon from our Lord’s lips, felt no difficulty in believing it, and he found his faith justified. If sin be forgiven, nothing is impossible. Surely it follows that if Jesus had power on earth to forgive sins, he can abundantly pardon now that we see him as the Son of God, enthroned in Heaven.

7. *And he arose, and departed to his house.*

His limbs had received strength, and he did what Jesus bade him do, at once. Faith grasped the Savior's command, and obeyed it. There was no delay, no deviation from orders, no failure in the performance. It must have seemed hard to leave one to whom he owed so much, and go at once to the retirement of his house; but he did as he was bidden, and therein he is an example to us all. He did not go to the temple with the sacramentarian, nor to the theater with the man of the world: he went to his home. His palsy had made his house sad, and now his healing would cheer his family. A man's restoration by grace is best seen in his own house. Lord, let it be seen in mine. Whether I carry my bed, or my bed carries me, may I do all to thy glory!

8. *But when the multitude saw it, they marveled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.*

It was openly seen by all "the multitudes." Crowds heard of the marvel; it was town talk. It was evidently no delusion: the hopelessly palsied had been assuredly healed; for he had carried off his mattress, and was gone home. The common people did not cavil; but they wondered, and then they trembled, and were overawed, and driven to the adoration of God. So far so good; but it did not go far enough, nor last long enough. Men may see, marvel, and even in words glorify God, and yet may not accept his Son as their Lord. The multitudes had common-sense enough to give the glory of such a work to God, and to be struck with surprise that he should "give such power unto men,." Evidently they viewed Jesus as a man on whom God had bestowed special gifts; a prophet who had received miraculous power and used it on the behalf of men. They went as far as they knew: we wish we could say the same of many who, in this day, refuse to give our Lord the divine honors which he claims and abundantly deserves. If "the Son of man" had all this power, how can we limit him as "the Son of God"? Let us not leave the narrative till we have glorified God for all the many ways in which he gives power to those who have no strength, raises believers out of the paralysis of sin, and makes them blessings to others.

9. *And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, Sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him,*

Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.

Thus our evangelist speaks of himself as “a man, named Matthew.” He says that the Lord “saw” him. What a seeing is meant here! Reader, may the Lord see you, whatever your name may be! Was Matthew at all like the man sick of the palsy? Does he mention his conversion here to suggest a parallel? His old name had been Levi: was Matthew his new name, or was it that which he had taken when he had degraded himself into a publican? At any rate, it is a beautiful name, meaning “given”: he was a gift of Jehovah. To us he has been a true Theodore, or God’s gift, by being the penman of this gospel. He was an official of a kingdom, and therefore all the more fit to write this “gospel of the kingdom.” He was at this time busy taking, but he was called to a work which is essentially giving. He was sitting in one place “at the receipt of custom”; but he was now to go about with his Lord doing good. Two words sufficed for his conversion and obedience: “Follow me.” They are very full and pregnant words. Like the palsied man, he did precisely what he was told to do: “He arose, and followed him.” Matthew describes his own conduct from personal knowledge, but he does not use a superfluous word. He acted with great decision and promptness. No doubt he saw his accounts settled; or, it may be, he had just sent them in, and he could leave at once without causing confusion in the custom-house. At any rate, he did there and then follow Jesus as a sheep follows its shepherd.

Lord, let my obedience towards thee be as the echo to the voice.

10-12. *And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciple. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.*

In Matthew’s house the Savior “sat at meat.” The new convert most naturally called in his old friends, that they might have the advantage of our Lord’s teaching: they would come to a supper more readily than to a sermon, and so he gave them a feast, and thus attracted them to the place where Jesus was. We may use all lawful means to bring others under the sound of the Word. A lot of the riff-raff came. “Sinner” by occupation, as well as sinners by character, ventured

in to the publican's house, and dared to sit "with him and his disciples" as if they had been members of his society. Probably they had been Matthew's boon companions, and now he wished them to become his brothers in Christ.

Our Lord willingly accepted Matthew's hospitality; for he desired to do good to those who most needed to be uplifted. He allowed persons of ill-fame to "sit down with him and his disciples." Here was a fine opportunity for the sneering Pharisees. They insinuated that the Lord Jesus could be but a sorry person, since he drew such a rabble around him, and even allowed them to be his table-companions. They were very careful of their company when any saw them; for they thought that their superior holiness would be debased by allowing sinners to sit with them; and now they have a handy stone to throw at Jesus while he eats with publicans and sinners.

The Pharisees were cowardly enough to speak their cavil to his disciples rather than to the Master; but the Leader put himself in the front, and soon baffled the adversaries. His reasoning was overwhelming, and his justification ample. Where should a physician be but among the sick? Who should come to a doctor's house but those who are diseased? Thus our Lord was more than justified in being the center to which the morally sick should gather for their spiritual healing.

Lord, grant that if ever I am found in the company of sinners, it may be with the design of healing them, and may I never become myself infected with their disease!

13. *But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

Our Lord, having gloriously defended himself from the insinuations of the proud Pharisees, now carries the war into the enemies' territory. He says to them, "Go ye and learn"; and this alone would be distasteful to men who thought they knew everything already. They were to learn the meaning of a Scripture in Hosea 6:6; and this would teach them that to have mercy upon sinners is a work more pleasing to God than the presenting of expensive sacrifices, or the performing of religious exercises They would learn that he had rather do mercy himself, and have them do mercy to others, than accept of their most punctilious observances.

The Lord Jesus also gave them a clear word as to his object in coming among men. He came not to be served by the good, but to save the evil. He had come to call to repentance those who needed repentance, and not those just ones who required no amendment, if such there were. This was a very just satire upon the Pharisees' self opinionated notions; but, at the same time, it was, and is, and for ever will be, a grand consolation for those who own their guilt. Our Savior King has come to save real sinners. He deals not with our merits, but with our demerits. There would be no need to save us if we were not lost: the Son of God does no unnecessary work; but to those who need repentance he has come to bring it.

Lord, I am one who needs thy call; for surely if anyone hath need to repent, I am that one. Call me with thine effectual call. "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned."

14. *Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?*

The disciples of John, like their leader, were ascetics; and therefore, like the Pharisees, abounded in fasts. They were scandalized because the disciples of Jesus were seen at feasts, and were not known to fast. They did not murmur in secret like the scribes, but had the matter out face to face. They came to him. Like honest friends, who felt hurt, they came to head-quarters, and asked the Lord himself. This open expression prevented after-dissension, and it was therefore wise. When good men differ, it is well to refer the matter to the Lord himself. To agree to differ may be all very well, but to have the difference removed by explanation is better far.

15. *And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.*

Here our Lord answered the second part of their enquiry; the first part they must answer on their own account. They knew, or ought to have known, why they and the Pharisees fasted. Why his disciples die not fast he proceeds to explain. He is "the Bridegroom" who came to woo and win his bride; those who followed him were the guests, the Bridegroom's best men and attendants; it was for them to

rejoice while the Bridegroom headed their company; for sorrow is not suitable for wedding-feasts. Our Lord is that Bridegroom of whom Solomon sang in the Song of songs, and we who enjoy his fellowship are one with him in his joy. Why should we fast while he is near? Can we allow little things to kill our great joy? Can we, in consistency with reason, and in harmony with respect for our Lord, mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with us?

But Jesus was to go. He says himself, “The Bridegroom shall be taken from them.” Here first he speaks about his death. Did his disciples note the warning word? When their Beloved was gone, they would have fasting enough. How true was this! Sorrows crowded in upon them when he was gone. It is the same with us. Our Lord is our joy: his presence makes our banquet; his absence is our fast, black and bitter. All Ritualistic fasting is the husk: the reality of fasting is known only to the child of the bridechamber when his Lord is no more with him. This is fasting indeed, as some of us know full well.

There is no wedding without a Bridegroom, no delight without Jesus. In his presence is fullness of joy; in his absence is depth of misery. Let but the heart rest in his love and it desireth nothing more. Take away a sense of his love from the soul, and it is dark, empty, and nigh unto death.

16. *No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is yet in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.*

Jesus came not to repair Israel’s worn vesture, but to bring new robes. Even if a mere mending had been aimed at, it could not have been effected through his disciples copying old ways. New cloth which has been unshrunk is not fit to be used as a patch to mend an old, garment, fully shrunk by many washings. His disciples must act consistently, and not join untimely fasting to their enjoyment of his company. They were not the kind of persons to repair the old religion of Judaism, which had become worn out. They were new men, unshrunk by the spirit of tradition; and to try to enclose them within the vesture of legal Ritualistic religion would not tend to unity, but the reverse. Genuine believers had better not attempt fellowship with ceremonialists; they will soon find themselves out of place. Jesus did not come to patch up our old outward religiousnesses, but to make a new robe of righteousness for us. All attempts to add the gospel to legalism will only make the rent worse. It may be added that

rash attempts to unite the various churches by comprehending all their errors within the pale of supposed truth, will only increase the present lamentable divisions, and postpone real unity to a distant day.

17. *Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: butt they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved.*

His teaching and spirit could not be associated with the Pharisaic order of things. Judaism in its degenerate condition was an old skin bottle which had seen its day, and our Lord would not our the new wine of the kingdom of heaven into it. - John's disciples were trying to emulate the Pharisees, and make common cause with them to save the old church. Jesus would have nothing to do with this project. he would have a new church for his new doctrine and for his new spirit. There was to be no amalgamation. Christianity was not to be an outgrowth of Rabbinism. There was to be a severance between Jesus, and the scribes and their school of thought; for he who had come was resolved to make all things new. There is rare teaching here, and guidance for the present crisis. Compromises are often proposed, and we have good people, like John's disciples, who would have us conform to what they think good in things established; but we had better act consistently, and begin de novo. The old cloth will always be tearing, and tearing all the worse because of our new pieces; therefore let us leave the old garment to those who prefer antiquity to truth.

The mixing of wedding feasts and funeral fasts, the patching of old cloth with pieces unfurled and unshrunk, and the putting of new wine into old bottles, are all pictures of those mixtures and compromises, which cannot, in the nature of things, serve any good and lasting purpose. If we follow the rejoicing Bridegroom, let us not try to keep in with the fasting Pharisees, or the sacramentarian legalists of the day. Let the Scientific Doubters also go; for faith is not of their mind: she knows, and can never be Agnostic. Let us have done with the doubts which make us fast, and let us hold high festival while the Bridegroom is still with us by his Spirit.

18, 19. *While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live. And*

Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did his disciples.

Our Lord had better work to do than to be talking about meats and drinks, feastings and fastings: he is soon clear of that debate. The battle of life and death was raging, and he was needed in the fray.

Sorrow comes even to the families of the excellent of the earth. A ruler of the synagogue and a believer in Jesus has such sickness befallen his daughter that she is at death's door, and is probably by this time actually dead. But the father has a grand faith. Even if she be dead, Jesus can restore her with a touch. Oh, that he would but come! He worships the Lord, and pleads with him: "Come and lay thy hand upon her, and, she shall live." Have we such faith as this? After centuries of manifestation, is Jesus as well trusted as in the days of his flesh? Have we not those among us who have not yet learned the happy blend which we see in the ruler's conduct? He came to Jesus, he worshipped him, he prayed to him, he trusted in him.

Our King, in whom is vested the power of life and death, yields at once to the petition of faith, and sets out for the ruler's house. The Lord follows believers, for believers follow their Lord: such is the order of verse 19. Jesus does as we pray, and we follow as he leads. The Preacher steps down from his pulpit, and becomes a visiting Surgeon, taking his rounds. From discussing Church questions our great Rabbi very readily turns aside to go and see a sick, nay, a dead girl. He is more at home in doing good than in anything else.

20, 21. *And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment: for she said within herself I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole.*

This is an incident on the road, a wonder by the way. While the Lord is moving towards the chamber of the ruler's dying daughter he works a miracle without a word. He was intent on his design to raise a girl; but without designing it he cures an older woman. The very spillings and overflowings of Christ's power are precious.

Note the word "behold." Here we have a notable circumstance. This afflicted

woman had suffered from a weakening hemorrhage for “twelve years”, and had found no cure; but now she beheld the great Miracleworker, and with a timid courage she pushed into the crowd, and touched the hem of his garment. Great fear kept her from facing him: great faith led her to believe that a touch of his robe behind him would cure her. She was ignorant enough to think that healing went from him unconsciously; but yet her faith lived despite her ignorance, and triumphed despite her bashfulness. It was her own idea to make a dash for it, and steal a cure: “She said within herself.” It was her wisdom that at once she carried out her resolve. Poor soul! it was her only chance, and she would not lose it. It happened that our Lord’s dress was drawn backward by the throng, and she was able with her finger to reach its hem. She believed that this would be enough, and so it proved Oh, that we were as eager to be saved as she was to be healed! Oh; that we had such confidence in Jesus as to be sure that if we come into contact with him, even by the least promise, and the smallest faith, he can and will save us!

My soul, when thou art in urgent need, be brave to come nigh unto thy Lord; for if a touch of his garment will heal, what virtue must lie in his own self!

22. *But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour.*

We have not all the story here. It will be well to read it in Mark 5. and Luke 8. Jesus knew all that was going on behind him. If his back be towards us now, it need not always be; for he “turned him about.” Even when fear would hide from Jesus, he spies out the trembler. His eye found her speedily, for he knew where to look. “He saw her.” His voice cheered her with joyful tones of acceptance. He did not chide the blundering of her ignorance, but he commended the bravery of her faith, and consoled her trembling heart. A piece of fringe and a finger sufficed to form a contact between a believing sufferer and an Almighty Savior. Along that line faith sent its message, and love returned the answer. She “was made whole”, and she knew it; but she feared when she was found out lest she should lose the blessing and earn a curse. This fear soon vanished: Jesus called her “daughter.” He fathered her because he had created faith in her. He gave her “good comfort” because she had good faith. It was his garment which she touched, but it was her faith which had touched it; therefore our Lord said, “Thy faith hath made thee whole”; and thus he put the crown upon the head of her

faith, because her faith had already set the crown on his head. The moment we touch Jesus we are made whole; yea, “from that hour.” May we touch him now, and may this hour be as memorable to us as that hour was to her!

23, 24. *And when Jesus came into the ruler’s house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, he said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn.*

The funeral wailing had already begun: “the minstrels” had commenced their hideous discords. Mistrustful friends are eager to bury us before the due time; and we are ourselves too apt to fall into the same error about others. Unbelief calls in the undertakers and the hired mourners to bury those who will yet live for years. We give over to hopelessness those whom Jesus will save; or we begin “making a noise” where a gracious,silent work would be far better.

Jesus will have the death-music quieted; for it is premature, and even false in its significance. He says to the minstrels, “Give place.” Many things have to give place when Jesus comes on the scene; and he takes care that they shall give place; for he puts them out of the room. To him the maid is asleep rather than dead; for he is about to call her back to life. He sees the future as well as the present; and to him in that light “the maid is not dead, but sleepeth.” The Lord Jesus wants not pipers, flute-players, and wailers; his own still voice is more fit for work in the death-chamber with a young girl. Jesus is going to do wonders, and the hired performances of those who mimic woe are not in tune therewith.

When Jesus tells the hired performers that there will be no need to proceed with the funeral, for the girl will live, they answer with scoffs, for they are sure that she is dead. It is a shameful thing to laugh at Christ. Yet “he endured such contradiction of sinners against himself”, and was not angry. We need not be dismayed when we are ridiculed; for “they laughed HIM to scorn.” Nor may we stop our working because of derision; for Jesus went on with his resurrection work despite the mockers.

20. *But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.*

It was not meet that a ribald throng should behold the majestic mystery of resurrection; they must be “put forth.” Moreover, the hideous noise of the funeral wailers was not a fit accompaniment of the Savior’s word of power. The people were turned out, and then the Lord “went in” to work his miracle. He loves to work in quiet. There are directions in modern church life in which noise and popular excitement will have to come to an end before much is done by the Lord.

When we read, “He took her by the hand”, it reminds us of his touching Peter’s wife’s mother. He shows a sacred familiarity with those whom he saves. He is not said in this gospel to have spoken, and thus the contrast between empty noise and his mighty silence, is brought out clearly. Life was gone from the maiden; but the result was the same as in the case of Peter’s relative who was still alive: she arose. How much had taken place before a dead girl could rise! This is the first case of resurrection by our Lord: it was that of one who had but just died, and it is typical of the giving of spiritual life to persons who have not yet come to the stage of corruption which necessitates carrying them out, like the widow’s son; or of actual decay, which has led to burial, as in the case of Lazarus. In each case the miracle was the same; but the surroundings greatly differed, so that the instruction varied.

Lord, take our dear young children by the hand, and raise them up to everlasting life while they are children!

26. *And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land.*

The news of the raising of the dead was sure to spread, especially as it was the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue. Where new life is bestowed, there will be no fear of its being unobserved. Jesus will have fame if we have life, and we should take care that it is so.

27. *And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.*

No sooner does Jesus move than fresh candidates for his bounty appear: the blind seek sight from him. Two sightless men had become companions in affliction; they may have been father and son. They were in downright earnest,

for they “followed him, crying, and saying, Have mercy on us” Persevering, vehement, yet intelligent was their appeal. They were of one mind in reference to Jesus, and therefore they went one way, and use one prayer, to one and the same person. Our Lord is here called by his royal name: “Thou Son of David.” Even the blind could see that he was a king’s son. As Son of David, he is entreated to show mercy, and act according to his royal nature. It is mercy which gives us our faculties, and mercy alone can restore them.

This prayer suits us when we perceive our own darkness of mind. When we cannot see our way into truth, let us appeal to the Lord for gracious instruction; ever remembering that we have no claim except that which originates in his mercy.

28. *And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord.*

They were most eager for the boon. They gave him no leisure: they pressed into the house where he had nought privacy and rest: they came to him, even to Jesus himself. The Lord would have them express their faith, and so he makes inquiry of them as to what they believe about himself. Jesus makes no inquiry about their eyes, but only about their faith: this is ever the vital point. They could not see, but they could believe; and they did so. They had a specific faith as to the matter about which they prayed; for our Lord put it plainly, “Believe ye that I am able to do THIS? “They had also a clear view of the character of him to whom they applied; for they had already styled him “Son of David”, and now they called him “Lord.”

29. *Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.*

Again he arouses their faith; and this time he throws the whole responsibility upon their confidence in him. “according to your faith be it unto you.” He touched them with his hand; but they must also touch him with their faith. The word of power in the last sentence is one upon which he acts so continually, that we may call it, as to many blessings, a rule of the kingdom. We have the measuring of our own mercies; our faith obtains less or more according to its

own capacity to receive. Had these men been mere pretenders to faith they would have remained blind. If we will not in very truth trust our Lord, we shall die in our sins.

30. *And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.*

They both saw: the double miracle was wrought at the same moment. Comrades in the dark, they are now companions in the light. Singular that for two souls there should thus be one destiny! It was a singular double fact, and deserved to be made widely known; but our Lord had wise reasons for requiring silence. He "straitly charged them." He left them no option: he demanded complete silence. He that opened their eyes closed their mouths. Jesus did not desire fame; he wanted less crowding; he wished to avoid excitement; and therefore he was express and peremptory in his order: "See that no man know it."

31. *But they, when they were departed, spread abroad his fame in all that country.*

They most industriously published what they were bidden to conceal, till "all that country" rang with the news. In this they erred greatly, and probably caused the Savior so much inconvenience by the pressure of the crowd, that he had to remove from the town. We may not hope that we are doing right if we disobey our Lord. However natural disobedience may appear to be, it is disobedience, and must not be excused. Even if the results turned out to be advantageous, it would not make it right to break the command of our Lord. Silence is more than golden when our King commands it. He doth not seek applause, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets that he may be known to be doing a great work. His followers do well to copy his example.

We do not wonder that our Lord's name became famous when there were such persons to advertise it. How earnestly and eloquently would the two formerly blind men tell the story of how he opened their eyes! We are not forbidden, but exhorted to make known the wonders of his grace. Let us not fail in this natural, this necessary, this useful duty. More and more let us "spread abroad his fame."

32. *As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.*

As a pair of patients leave the surgery, another poor creature comes in. Note the "behold." The case is striking. He comes not freely, or of his own accord: "they brought" him: thus should we bring men to Jesus. He does not cry for help, for he is "a dumb man." Let us open our months for the dumb. He is not himself, but he is "possessed with a devil." Poor creature! will anything be done for him?

33. *And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marveled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.*

Our Lord does not deal with the symptoms, but with the source of the disorder, even with the evil spirit. "The devil was cast out"; and it is mentioned as if that were a matter of course when Jesus came on the scene. The devil had silenced the man, and so, when the evil one was gone, "the dumb spake." How we should like to know what he said! Whatever he said it matters not; the wonder was that he could say anything. The people confessed that this was a wonder quite unprecedented; and in this they only said the truth: "It was never so seen in Israel." Jesus is great at surprises: he has novelties of gracious power. The people were quick to express their admiration; yet we see very little trace of their believing in our Lord's mission. It is a small thing to marvel, but a great thing to believe.

O Lord, give the people around us to see such revivals and conversions, as they have never known before!

34. *But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.*

Of course, they had some bitter sentence ready. Nothing was too bad for them to say of Jesus. They were hard pressed when they took to this statement, which our Lord in another place so easily answered. They hinted that such power over demons must have come to him through an unholy compact with "the prince of the devils." Surely this was going very near to the unpardonable sin.

35. *And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.*

This was his answer to the blasphemous slanders of the Pharisees. A glorious reply it was. Let us answer calumny by greater zeal in doing good.

Small places were not despised by our Lord: he went about the villages as well as the cities. Village piety is of the utmost importance, and has a close relation to city life. Jesus turned old institutions to good account: the “synagogues” became his Seminaries. Three-fold was his ministry: expounding the old, proclaiming the new, healing the diseased.

Observe the repetition of the word “every” as showing the breadth of his healing power. All this stood in relation to his royalty; for it was “the gospel of the kingdom” which he proclaimed. Our Lord was “the Great Itinerant”: Jesus went about preaching, and healing. His was a Medical Mission as well as an evangelistic tour. Happy people who have Jesus among them! Oh, that we might now see more of his working among our own people!

36. *But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*

A great crowd is a demand upon compassion, for it suggests so much sin and need. In this case, the great want was instruction: “they fainted” for I want of comfort; they “were scattered abroad” for lack of guidance. They were eager to learn, but they had no fit teachers. “Sheep having no shepherd” are in an ill plight. Unfed, unfolded, unguarded, what will become of them? Our Lord was stirred with a feeling which agitated his inmost soul. “He was moved with compassion.” What he saw affected not his eye only, but his heart. He was overcome by sympathy. His whole frame was stirred with an emotion which put every faculty into forceful movement. He is even now affected towards our people in the same manner. He is moved with compassion if we are not.

37, 38. *Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous,*

but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest.

His heavy heart sought solace among “his disciples”, and he spake to them. He mourned the scantiness of workers. Pretenders were many, but real “laborers” in the harvest were few. The sheaves were spoiling. The crowds were ready to be taught, even as ripe wheat is ready for the sickle; but there were few to instruct them, and where could more teaching men be found?

God only can thrust out, or “send forth laborers” Man-made ministers are useless. Still are the fields encumbered with gentlemen who cannot use the sickle. Still the real ingatherers are few and far between. Where are the instructive, soul-winning ministries? Where are those who travail in birth for their hearers’ salvation? Let us plead with the Lord of the harvest to care for his own harvest, and send out his own men. May many a true heart be moved by the question, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? “to answer,” Here am I! Send me.”

Matthew 10

1. *And when he had called unto him twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.*

See the way of making apostles. They were first disciples, and afterwards teachers of others: they were specially his, and then they were given to be a blessing to men. They were “called unto him”; and thus their higher call came to them. In the presence of their Lord they received their equipment: “and gave them power.” Is that so with us in our own special office? Let us come to him, that we may be clothed with his authority and girded with his strength.

Their power was miraculous; but it was an imitation of their Lord’s, and the words applied to it are very much the same as we have seen in use about his miracles of healing. The twelve were made to represent their Lord. We, too, may be enabled to do what Jesus did among men. Oh, for such an endowment!

2. *Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John. his brother.*

The Holy Spirit does not object to truthful statistics: there were twelve apostles. This was a complete number, neither too many nor too few; and a number which linked the spiritual Israel with the nation which had typified it. The Holy Spirit has no love to the anonymous, or to the use of initials, as some have in these days. He gives the names, and why not? Order is observed in this muster-roll. “The first”, for he generally put himself first, and was by his energy and ability most fittingly the leader,

“Simon who is called Peter”, “a stone”; and a right solid stone he came to be.

With him is Andrew, his manly brother. It is well when brothers in the flesh are brothers in spirit. Then come James and John, the two sons of thunder; one of them so early to be a martyr, the other so inexpressibly dear to the Lord Jesus.

3. *Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican: James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus.*

It seems probable that Bartholomew is Nathanael, whom Philip led to Jesus: they are well put together. Bartholomew is never mentioned without an and: he was a kind of man to work with other people. It is also likely that Lebbaeus is Jude, or "Judas, not Iscariot": there may have been some link between him and James. A man may have an alias, and yet not be an alien. Observe how Matthew keeps us in mind that he had been a publican. With holy gratitude he thus records his former estate, that the grace which called him might be the more conspicuous. Thomas was as truly called by the Lord as any of them, though he was one whose mind entertained distressing questions.

4. *Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.*

Thus they go two and two, till the traitor brings up the rear. Simon the Zealot is cooled down by the calculating prudence of Judas Iscariot Judas was probably the best financier of the company, and he comes at the end with the bag. This quality rendered him useful, but it was perverted to his ruin, for he sold his Master for silver. What a description to follow a name — "who also betrayed him"! God grant it may never be set after the name of any one of us! The apostolic number fitly represents the twelve tribes of Israel; and for practical purposes the twelve form a workable band of leaders, a. sufficient jury, and a competent company of witnesses.

5, 6. *These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

This was "a mission to the Jews" only, meant for the general arousing of the chosen nation. It is an example of a special mission, and it gives authority for

missions to special characters; but it must not be made into an example by which the Lord is supposed to prescribe a cast-iron rule for all missions. The people at that time were favorably disposed to our Lord, and thus his apostles might expect treatment of a more generous kind than can be looked for in these times. Certain of these regulations were altered on a subsequent mission, when the people were less favorably disposed. This was a mission from Israel to Israel. It was not for the Gentiles, but it was to be strictly confined to "the House of Israel." Even the people most like the Jews were not to be visited: "Into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not." It was a search for "lost sheep of the house of Israel", in the pastures near the fold. We may occasionally have class-services-for working-men, etc.; but the standing orders are not so, but rather, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

7. *And as ye go, preach saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.*

Their first work was proclaiming the coming kingdom, and preparing the way for the coming King. Those Israelites who were willing might become subjects of this heavenly kingdom, and therefore were they informed of its near approach.

8. *Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.*

Having ministered to souls, they were to bless the bodies of men; and thus they would confirm their message by their miracles. These deeds of mercy are on the ascending scale: note the steps. All; was to be done without fee or reward: their powers had not been purchased, their miracles were not to be sold.

9, 10. *Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.*

They would not need to pay for food or lodging: the people would entertain them freely, and therefore they required no form of money; not even a copper. They needed not to carry a wallet; for meals would be generously offered them by those whom they instructed and healed. They were not to load themselves with extra clothing; for if the weather should require it, the people would supply it:

even if their shoes wore out, their hearers would see them shod. When a ministry is really acceptable, the preacher will not be left to suffer want as to the absolute necessaries of life. They needed not even wait to find a staff; for if one was required, and they set off without it, one would be given. Among a willing people, such a mission is not only possible, but it is in the highest degree suitable. It is but right and just that people should support in temporals those who minister to them in spirituals, and it is right that plans should be adopted which cast this duty upon them, as in this case. The preacher is to preach freely; but those who are benefited are also freely to find meat for him. Such a mission as this is not a mission to the heathen in any sense. Its methods are good for itself, but they would not be possible among hostile tribes: in the case of work among opponents, our Lord's command under other circumstances is to be followed. See Luke 22:36: "He that hath a purse, let him take it," etc. Different modes of procedure are to be adopted at different times. Oh, that some of our very spiritual brethren had a little common-sense! We offer the prayer with very faint heart.

11. *And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence.*

Seek out people fit to be associated with you in holy service. Whatever their circumstances may be, regard chiefly their character. For the best work look out the best men. Do not compromise your Master by lodging with persons of evil repute. But do not shift your quarters, or run from one to another, lest you seem mere mendicants, begging from door to door.

Keep to those good people with whom your mission begins. It may be that richer people will turn up; but never forget the worthy men and women who first entertained you. Wise rules, these. This is not the method to be followed among the heathen, where none can be called "worthy." There we seek the sinful, and feel ourselves sent to the most degraded.

12. *And when ye come into an house, salute it.*

Say, "Peace be to this house." Be very courteous openly, and very benevolent inwardly. You come as a benediction, come with a benediction. We ought never to enter a house without wishing it good, nor to leave it without having

endeavored to make it better.

13. *And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you.*

Think well of all till they prove by their conduct that your good opinion is an error. Bless the house, and if it be worthy, the Lord will make your blessing effectual, and peace shall dwell there; but if the house be not worthy, the blessing shall, by your Lord's ordinance, "return to you", and that will enable you to bear the rebuff without being discouraged. We cannot judge of worthiness; but the Lord will do so. We are to hope well of all. We shall get good even if we fail to do good. If the failure be through no fault of ours, it will be no failure to us.

14. *And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.*

Disclaim all fellowship with those who will not have fellowship with your Lord. Be not angry; do not denounce with bitterness; just "shake off the dust of your feet," and go elsewhere. Don't depart to rail at the people in private; but let them know that you quit them because they refuse your message. Do this openly, and in the most solemn and instructive manner, hoping that your departing act may be remembered. It is to be feared that we treat rejectors of Christ in a sadly biding manner, and do not hold up their rejection of our King to the detestation it deserves. We ought to let impenitent sinners know that we consider them out of our fellowship. If they will not hear, we must make them see that we disown them, and count them to be unclean, because they refuse Christ Jesus. How little of this is done by the smooth-tongued preachers of today! Men may refuse their gospel, and still be the bosom friends of those who preach to them. Yea, they try even from the pulpit to cheer them in their impenitence by the dream of a "larger hope."

15. *Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.*

The accursed cities of the plain may look for a fearful doom; but their portion

will not be so unbearable as that of those to whom the gospel comes in freest fashion; and yet they will not receive its messengers, nor even hear their words. With what solemnity do these threatenings surround both the preaching and the hearing of the kingdom! Our Lord seals his terrible prophecy with a Verily and with that solemn introduction, “I say unto you.”

Here our ever-blessed King sends forth his royal ambassadors under orders to summon the Jewish nation to own their sovereign Lord; and he supports them in their errand by a tremendous threat of doom to those who will not receive them, or listen to their words.

16. *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

“Behold.” Our Lord calls for special attention, and then sets before his sent ones, both then and now, what would be the future of their crusade. What he was doing was very wonderful; hence the “Behold.”

It would be foolhardy to go if Jesus did not say, “I send you.” When Jesus sends forth sheep, they may go fearlessly into the very “midst of wolves.” He sends them, not to fight with wolves, nor to drive them out of their haunts, but to transform them. The disciples were sent to fierce men to convince them, and therefore they must be wise; to convert them, and therefore they must be gentle. The weapons of Christians are that they are weaponless. They are to be prudent, discreet, “wise as serpents”; but they are to be loving, peaceful, “harmless as doves.” The Christian missionary will need to be wary, to avoid receiving harm; but he must be of a guileless mind, that he do no harm. We are called to be martyrs, not maniacs; we are to be simple-hearted, but we are not to be simpletons.

After all, the mission of sheep to wolves is a hopeful one, since we see in the natural world that the sheep, though so feeble, by far outnumber the wolves who are so fierce. The day will come when persecutors will be as scarce as wolves, and saints as numerous as sheep.

Lord, in my work for thee, so teach me that I may display the wonderful blend of serpent and dove, which thou cost here commend to thy ministers. Never allow me to become to others like a wolf, but may I conquer by the meekness of a

lamb!

17, 18. *But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.*

“Beware of men.” Do not rely upon them, or regard them as fellow- helpers in setting up the kingdom of heaven, nor attempt to soften down your testimony to suit their taste. Do not court their approbation, or place any great value upon their favor. They will not shelter you, but “deliver you up”; they will not arrange for, your entertainment, but for your accusation before councils; they will not load you with decorations, but lash you with scourges in their places of public assembly. Thus would Israelites treat Israelites. The cruelty described by the words, “scourge you in their synagogues” must surely have been a refinement of malice; yet with some men persecution is a part of religion.

The malice of the Jews would call in the interference of Gentile magistrates and monarchs. These also would become persecutors, and before their tribunals saints would have to plead for their lives; but as this would be for Christ’s sake, they would thus be enabled to bear witness for their Lord, and against his foes. In this way only would heathen governors and kings be likely to hear their testimony; and therefore they were to welcome the summons to appear before earthly rulers.

Our attitude must be one of caution towards men. We must not commit ourselves to them, nor rely on their patronage; but we must at the same time make use of every opportunity to testify for our Lord before them. Our Protector and Lord is in heaven.

19. *But when they deliver you up take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.*

When you are before the judge, or about to be there, do not worry yourself about “what you shall speak.” Be not anxious as to your manner or matter when on your defense. If you are the Lord’s true servant, you are the spokesman of the Holy Spirit; he will work in, you a peaceful frame of mind, and fit words “shall

be given you." He will speak in you and through you. The Father himself will put into your mouth, at the moment, the fittest reply to your adversaries. This has been wonderfully true in former ages in the cases of martyrs for the truth's sake; and bold defenders of the faith still receive the same kind of guidance. Simple peasants have groveled great philosophers, and humble women have put learned ecclesiastics to a nonplus.

20. *For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.*

All along, men of God are simply instruments for God. Our Lord Jesus claimed to speak, not of himself, but from the Father; and to this he conforms his faithful witnesses. They speak and yet they speak not: God is silent and yet he speaks by them.

21. *And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall use up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.*

Unnatural hatreds have sprung out of religious bitterness. The old serpent not only endeavors to poison the relationship of the creature to the Creator, but even that of child to parent, and parent to child. Brothers can become unbrotherly, and all other relations unnatural, when under the dominion of religious bigotry. In times of persecution we may not expect love to ourselves from those who love not God. It might have seemed impossible that blood relations should be willing to assist in compassing the death of each other; but history has abundantly shown that our Lord's words were none too strong. He knew the hearts of men, and forewarned his disciples of the pitiless tempest which would beat upon in consequence of human enmity to the truth.

22. *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.*

These are heavy words, but true. If we are faithful we shall of necessity make enemies. Jesus as good as says—The classes and the masses will turn against you because of the name, the doctrine, and the rule of your Master. Sometimes

the monarch, and sometimes the mob will rage against you; but either from one or other, or both, shall the opposition arise. “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake” was the storm-signal by which successive persecutions were announced. That signal may again be displayed in the order of divine providence. Happy are they who can bear persecution, and hold on and hold out even “to the end” of the trial—the close of life, or the termination of the dispensation. Such “shall be saved” indeed; but those who can be overcome by opposition are lost.

May the Lord prepare us to bear up under the utmost unkindness, and hold on till the day of judgment comes, or till he makes even our enemies to be at peace with us!

23. *But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.*

They were to keep to their work, and preach in all the cities of Israel; but they might flee from danger in one city, and move to another. They were not to stop in a town, and contend with the magistrates, and create confusion and disorder, but quickly to move off when they were cruelly opposed. It is to the last degree foolish to attempt to force religion upon men: it advances by gentleness, and not by violence. If a town is up in arms against the preacher, let him go where he will be less opposed.

There would always remain cities which needed the light. They would not be forced to cease their labors, because certain towns closed their gates against them. Much waste land needed reclaiming, let them hasten to fresh fields, and raise harvests there.

While they were to change their place they were to keep to their plan. Their mission to Israel was to be a quick; work altogether, for the Lord would soon visit the land in judgment; and they would hardly have time to traverse the whole country before Israel’s day of mercy as a nation, dwelling in her own land, would come to a close. The persecution which they felt in one city should quicken their pace in going to another, and so promote the rapid visitation of the whole country. They were not to delay over a hopeless town, for they had no time to spare. In some such diligent manner ought we to evangelize the world,

believing that we have not an hour in which to loiter; for the Son of man may come on a sudden. If his Advent were very speedily to happen, it would come before all tribes and peoples had heard his gospel; and this must not be. Many should run to and fro and spread the knowledge of his cross. If we do not do this willingly, it may be we shall be driven to it. Persecution has often been a spur to the church. Let us be diligent in our holy calling, and preach the gospel while we can do so in peace, for perilous times may be upon us, or the Lord himself may appear before we think.

24, 25. *The disciple is not above His master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?*

The scholar is not more excellent than the teacher, nor the servant than his master. Who would wish to see such a violation of all order and rule? Therefore, even if we had not had so much respect paid to us as to our Lord, we ought to have been well content. If we receive the same treatment as our Master, we have enough honor, and more than we have a right to expect. What then? If the Master of the family is likened to Beelzebub, the fly-god of the Philistines, and named after the prince of demons, by what names will they call us? Doubtless malice will quicken wit, and sarcasm will invent words which pierce as daggers, and cut like knives. Thank God, they may call us what they like, but they cannot make us evil. They can, and wild, cast out our names as evil, for they call good evil, and evil good. God was slandered in Paradise, and Christ on Calvary; how can we hope to escape? Instead of wishing to avoid bearing the cross, let us be content to endure dishonor for our King s sake. Let it be our ambition to be as our Master in all things. Since we are “of his household”, let us rejoice to share with “the Master of the house.” It is so great an honor to be of the royal household, that no price is too high to pay in consequence. Close conformity to the image of their Lord is the glory of saints. To “be as his master” is to every true servant the climax of his ambition.

O Lord Jesus, our Savior King, we see how thou wast treated, and we joyfully enter into the fellowship of thy sufferings! Grant us grace never to shrink in our loyalty to thee, cost whatever it may.

26. *Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.*

The King gives reasons for courage, saying, “Fear them not therefore.” Have no fear of slander; your Lord and Master bore the full blast of that pitiless storm. Have no fear of misrepresentation, for the great God will right :-our characters before long. You and your traducers will alike be shown up in the colors of truth. Though you should be “covered” with obloquy, your integrity shall be “revealed”; though your true value is “hid”, it shall yet be “known.” Secret villainy and secret virtue will alike be set in the full blaze of day. Anticipate the future, and be not overwhelmed by the present.

27. *What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.*

God is the great revealer, and, you should imitate him by publishing the truth to men. Go on, true believers, with your proper work, as mouths for God. Tell out what your Master tells you. Receive a message from himself in your quiet meditation, and then make it known everywhere. Hear it like a whisper in your ear, and then sound it forth as the eastern town-crier, who gets to the highest point in the village, and makes all the people hear from “the housetops.” Keep the study and the closet out of sight, and there in secret meet with Jesus; and then set the pulpit of testimony in as conspicuous a place as you can find. If plunged “in darkness” of sickness, trouble, or distress, listen to him whose voice is heard in the thick darkness, and then “speak ye in light” the profitable lessons ye have learned.

Lord, let no one of us speak till thou speakest to him, and then let him not be silent. May all thy disciples present to thee their opened ears, and then use in thy cause their fire-touched tongues!

28. *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

This, following upon the former verse, forbids us to forbear our testimony from

fear of men. We may not say less or more because of the opposition of the foe. A mighty argument against fear is the comparative weakness of the enemy. Men can only wound our inferior part, the body, but are not able to kill the soul. But if we disobey God, the Supreme Lord of life and death has power even to destroy both parts of our being by casting them both into the death and darkness of Gehenna, or hell. Let us fear the Greater, and we shall not fear the less. There is no cure for the fear of man like the fear of God.

29-31. *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

Here is a sermon against fear, and sparrows are the text. Those birds are of little worth, and you are of far greater consideration than many of them. God observes the death of a sparrow, and he much more notes the lives and deaths of his people. Even the least part of his children's bodily frame has been registered. The very hairs of their head are counted and catalogued; and, to the most minute circumstance, all their lives are under the arrangement of the Lord of love. Chance is not in our creed: the decree of the Eternal Watcher rules our destiny, and love is seen in every line of that decree.

Since we shall not suffer harm at the hand of men by their arbitrary conduct, apart from the will and permission of our Father, let us be ready to bear with holy courage whatever the wrath of man may bring upon us. God will not waste the life of one of his soldiers; no, nor a hair of his head. If we die in God's battle we live in the grandest sense, for by loss of life we gain life.

32, 33. *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.*

Because divine providence rules over all, the destiny of believers is secure beyond fear of harm, and they must not shrink from the boldest avowal of their faith because of anxiety to preserve their lives. Our business is to confess Christ

before men. In him the truth we acknowledge begins, centers, and ends. Our Confession of Faith is a confession of Christ: he is our theology, or Word of God. What a joy to confess him now! What a reward to be confessed by him hereafter in the glory-world! It will be a high offense against the great God, whom Jesus twice calls “my Father which is in heaven”, if we fail to confess his Son on earth.

It is clear that in this passage to “deny” Jesus means,—not to confess him. What a grave warning is this for the cowardly believer! Can a non-confessing faith save? To live and die without confessing Christ before men is to run an awful risk. Actually to recant and give up Christ must be a dreadful crime, and the penalty is fearful to contemplate. Disowned by Jesus before his Father who is in heaven! What hell can be worse?

Lord, let me never blush to own thee in all companies! Work in me a bold spirit by thy Holy Spirit. Let me confess thy truth whatever the spirit of the age may be, uphold thy church when she is most despised, obey thy precepts when they cost most dear, and glory in thy name when it is most reproached.

34-36. *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.*

Peace will be the ultimate issue of our Lord’s coming; but, at the first, the Lord Jesus sends a sword among men. He wars against war, and contends against contention. In the act of producing the pence of heaven he arouses the rage of hell. Truth provokes opposition, purity excites enmity, and righteousness arouses all the forces of wrong.

During the process of fermentation, in which the right works for mastery, natural relationships go for nothing as preservatives of peace. The coming of Christ into a house is often the cause of variance between the converted and the unconverted. The more loving the Christian is, the more he may be opposed: love creates a tender zeal for the salvation of friends, and that very zeal frequently calls forth resentment. We are to expect this, and not to be put about by it when it occurs. Animosities on account of religion often excite the fiercest

of enmities, and nearness of kin inflames rather than quenches the hostility. We are to press on in confessing the Lord Jesus, come what may of it. Even if our house becomes a den of lions to us, we must stand up for our Lord. The peace-at-any-price people have no portion in this kingdom.

Lord, teach us how to behave in these trying circumstances.

37. *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

Christ must be first. He herein claims the highest place in every human breast. Could he have done so had he not been divine? No mere prophet would talk in this fashion. Yet we are not sensible of the slightest egotism in his speech, neither does it occur to us that he goes beyond his line. We are conscious that the Son of God has a right to speak thus, and only he.

We must earnestly beware of making idols of our dearest ones, by loving them more than Jesus. We must never set them near the throne of our King. We are not worthy to dwell with Christ above, nor even to be associated with him here, if any earthly object is judged by us to be worthy to rival the Lord Jesus.

Father and mother, son and daughter — we would do anything to please them; but, as opposed to Jesus, they stand nowhere, and cannot for an instant be allowed to come in the way of our supreme loyalty to our Lord.

38. *And he that taketh, not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*

Here our Lord for the second time in this gospel brings in his death. At first he spoke of being taken from them; but now of the cross. There is a cross for each one which he may regard as “his cross.” It may be that the cross will not take us up, but we must take it up, by being willing to endure anything or everything for Christ’s sake. We are not to drag the cross after us, but to take it up. “Dragged crosses are heavy; carried crosses grow light.” Bearing the cross, we are to follow after Jesus: to bear a cross without following Christ is a poor affair. A Christian who shuns the cross is no Christian; but a crossbearer who does not follow Jesus equally misses the mark. Is it not singular that nothing in so

essential to make a man worthy of Christ as cross-bearing in his track? Yet it is assuredly so. Lord, thou hast laid a cross upon me, do not permit me to shirk it, or shrink from it.

39. *He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*

If to escape from death he gives up Christ, and so finds a continuance of this poor mortal life; by that very act he loses true life. He gains the temporal at the expense of the eternal. On the other hand, he who loses life for Christ's sake does in the highest sense find life, life eternal, life infinitely blessed. He makes the wisest choice who lays down his life for Jesus, and finds life in Jesus.

40. *He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.*

What blessed union and hallowed communion exist between the King, and his servants! The words before us are especially true of the apostles to whom they were first addressed. Apostolic teaching is Christ's teaching. To receive the twelve is to receive their Lord Jesus, and to receive the Lord Jesus is to receive God himself. In these days certain teachers despise the epistles which were written by apostles, and they are themselves worthy to be despised for so doing. This is one of the sure tests of soundness in the faith. "He that is of God heareth us", says John. This bears hard on modern critics who in a hypocritical manner pretend to receive Christ, and then reject his inspired apostles.

Lord, teach me to receive thy people into my heart, that thus I may receive thee; and as to the doctrine which I hold, be pleased to establish me in the apostolic faith.

41. *He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.*

Men may receive a prophet as a patriot, or a poet: that is not the point in hand. The prophet must be received in his highest character, "in the name of a

prophet", and for the sake of his Lord; and then the Lord himself is received, and he will reward the receiver in the same way in which his prophet is rewarded. If we cannot do all the good deeds of a righteous man, we can yet partake in his happiness by having fellowship with him, and by uniting with him in vindicating the faith and comforting his heart. To receive into our homes and our hearts God's persecuted servants is to share their reward. To maintain the cause and character of good men is to be numbered with them in God's account. This is all of grace; since the deed is so little and the recompense so large.

42. *And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little once a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.*

He looked away from the apostles to some of the least and youngest of those who followed him, end he declared that the very least kindness shown to them should have its recompense. There may be a sea of warm love in "a cup of cold water." Much loyalty to the King may be expressed by little kindnesses to his servants, and perhaps more by kindness to the little ones among them than by friendship with the greater sort. To love a poor and despised child of God for Christ's sake shows greater love to Christ than if we love the honorable, and amiable, and rich members of his church.

Acts of love are divinely estimated rather by motive than by measure. "A cup", and that "of cold water", may mean as much from one as banquet from another. Cold water has a special value in a hot climate; but this text makes it precious anywhere. Giving refreshment may be made a choice means of fellowship with holy men, if we give it because they are disciples; and specially so when persecuting governments make it penal to succor the saints in any way.

Though every kindly deed is its own reward, yet the Lord promises a further recompense. What we give for Christ's sake is insured against loss by the promise of the text, by the "Verily, I say unto you", which confirms it, and by the use of the negative "in no wise", which shuts out all possibility of its being otherwise.

Matthew 11

1. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding his twelve disciples, he departed thence to teach and to preach in their cities.*

He arranged their missionary tour, and then followed in their wake. It was his plan to send them two and two through the cities of Israel, and then to follow them up in person, and sustain their testimony by his own instruction; for he came “to teach and to preach” We are to do our best for men, and then to hope that our Lord will deign to certify and confirm our teaching by his own coming to men’s hearts. The term, “their cities”, sounds rather singular. Had our Lord given those cities to the twelve? It would seem so. In a spiritual sense we go first and take possession of the souls entrusted to us, and then the King himself comes in and takes his own at our hands. Lord, give me many souls which may be thine in the day of thine appearing. To this end I would gladly go at thy bidding, and preach thy Word, trusting that I may hear the sound of my Master’s feet behind me.

2, 3. *Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*

Here we begin quite another story. The first verse ought to have gone with the preceding chapter, to which it belongs. John was in prison: he did not make a good caged bird — he of the wilderness and the river — and his faith began to flag. So some think. Was it so? Or was this embassy sent to our Lord for the sake of John’s disciples? Were they wavering so much that John could not reassure them without the aid of Jesus? Or was it that John would intimate to our Lord

that there were doubts abroad which would be met by a further proclamation of his mission? Was this all that John now thought himself able to do — namely, to call upon the Lord to state his claims in the most decisive manner? Did John resolve to draw from our Lord a very clear statement, that his disciples might thus be readily transferred to Jesus? The question as to our Lord's having a mission was surely not for John's sake: he knew full well that Jesus was the Son of God. But when he heard of all that Jesus did, he may have wondered that he himself was left in prison, and he may have thought that possibly another was yet to come before all things could be rectified. Dark thoughts may come to the bravest when pent up in a narrow cell. It was well that John's question was put, that it might receive a distinct reply; reassuring for himself, and instructive for us.

4, 5. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again these things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*

Our Lord makes no assertion, but sets clear evidence before the eyes of John's delegates. He based the evidence of his Messiahship upon his miracles. Why is it that, in these days, it is said that the miracles are rather a trial of faith than a support of it? An unbelieving generation turns even food into poison. What John had heard in prison his messengers were to see for themselves, and then to tell to their imprisoned master.

Prison walls cannot shut out news of Jesus; but good news comes best through friends who are personal witnesses.

The messengers received command "Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see." Of hearing and seeing they had more than they could fully report, and more than enough to make them see for themselves that Jesus was the Christ. The cures wrought were all beneficent, superhuman, and of a kind foretold by the prophets as signaling the coming of Messiah. The proof was cumulative: the argument increased in power. The last two proofs are evidently placed as the climax of the argument: "The dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." These two wonders are placed side by side. There is as much of the miraculous in the poor man's gospel as in the dead man's resurrection.

John's disciples had come at a right time when our Lord's work was in full swing, and all these wonderful works were following each other rapidly. Jesus is his own proof. If men would have arguments for the gospel, let them hear and see what it is, and what it does. Let us tell to souls in the prison of doubt what we have seen Jesus do.

6. *And brewed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

That man is blessed who so believes, that his faith cannot be stumbled. A hint for John. John had not fallen, but very possibly he had stumbled. He had been a little put to it, through a sense of non-deliverance in time of need, and therefore he had asked the question. Blessed is he who can be left in prison, can be silenced in his testimony, can seem to be deserted of his Lord, and yet can shut out every doubt. John speedily regained this blessedness, and fully recovered his serenity.

Lord, grant me to be firmly settled in my convictions, that I may enjoy the blessedness which flows from unstaggering faith. May nothing about thee ever cause me to stumble at thee!

7. *And as they departed, Jesus began to say unto the multitudes concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind.*

Our Lord will sooner or later bear testimony to the man who has faithfully testified of him. John honors Jesus; and in due time Jesus honors John. Our Lord asks his hearers what they thought of John. You went to see John; you even "went out into the wilderness" to have a look at him.

What did you see? A vacillating orator? A man who felt the influence of his times, and bowed before its spirit, like a bulrush in the breeze? Nay, verily; John was no time-server, no flattering courtier, no pleaser of the great. The Baptist had not sent to Jesus because he was weak, but because he was honestly outspoken, and so anxious for absolute certainty that he could not endure the shadow of a doubt. John sent to headquarters to make assurance doubly sure, by a new declaration from Christ's own lips.

8. *But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?*

behold,they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.

Did you see a man of courtly manners, costly dress, pompous diction, delicate expressions? Was John a court preacher, fit to flatter royal ladies? If so, how came he to be in the wilderness? Behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. John was hated for his plain rebukes, and revenge against him burned in the heart of one near the throne because he knew not how to be silent in the presence of royal sin. John the Baptist was not in the palace: he had been promoted to the prison. His style had grated on the ear of a shameless princess; for he knew not how to speak soft words like those who are "clothed in soft raiment." Thus does our Lord bear witness to John who came to be his witness.

9, 10. *But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*

John was all that the very greatest of the prophets had been; and he came nearer to Jesus than all the rest; his Master's steps were close upon his heel. He shone like Milton's star —

"Fairest of stars, last in the train of night, If better thou belong'st not to the dawn."

He was almost a gospel-preacher, and failing to reach that point, he was chief among the prophets, yea, and more than a prophet. In the book of Malachi, the Lord God had promised to send a messenger before Messiah, and now the Messiah himself quotes the prophecy with a change of persons not to be understood save as we believe in the Trinity in Unity. He who is "Me" is also "Thee" according to the aspect in which he is regarded, or the person who speaks. John was the messenger of God to prepare the way of the Lord Jesus, and our Lord recognizes him in that honored capacity. Jesus is not ashamed of his herald because he is in prison, but the rather he speaks the more openly of him. John had confessed his Lord, and now his Lord confesses him. This is a rule with our King.

11. *Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there*

hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven greater than he.

Jesus sets John in a very high position, and we know that his judgment is true. Up till the coming of our Lord, John was greatest of woman born; but the new dispensation was on a higher plane, for "the kingdom of heaven" was set up. As we may say, as a rule, that the darkest day is lighter than the brightest night; so John, though first of his own order, is behind the last of the new or gospel order. The least in the gospel stands on higher ground than the greatest under the law. How privileged are we who, by virtue of entering into the kingdom of heaven by faith, are made to see, and hear, and enjoy those things which even the prophet of prophets could not enter upon! We may rest assured that there is nothing better to be discovered or revealed than that heavenly kingdom into which our Lord and King has brought us.

12. *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.*

John had aroused an unusual earnestness which had not died out. Men were eager for the glories of "the kingdom of heaven." Though they misinterpreted it, they were on fire to seize it. John himself, in his excess of eagerness, had sent his two disciples to our Lord with an impatient question. Our Savior does not blame his intense enquiry; but says that so it must be. A holy violence had been introduced by John, and they had just seen it in his question, and our Lord would have all those who would obtain the kingdom capture it by the same passionate eagerness. The time was come to end indifference, and put on a holy resolution as to the things of God.

Thus the King sets forth the spirit demanded in these who would take part and lot in his great cause and kingdom. Lord, wake us up! Suffer us not to be using dead formality, where living violence can alone avail.

13. *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*

God left not himself without witness all along. John ended the chain of foreseers and foretellers, and now the Lord himself appears. Our Lord draws a line at John

by saying “until John”: henceforth the kingdom is set up.

14. *And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.*

John was the Elijah for whom they looked. Would people believe it? Would they obey his command to repent? Then he would be to them a true Elijah, and make straight for them the way of the Lord. Even a man sent of God is to his hearer very much what that hearer chooses to make of him. No doubt, many a great boon has been missed by men failing to accept it. “If ye will receive it,” a minister, may be the channel of salvation, or the means of spiritual edification, or of surpassing joy; but if not received it may become a weariness, or as meaningless as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.

15. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

This matter is worthy of earnest heed. If you can hear anything, hear this truth. This call to attention needs to be oft repeated. Through the hearing ear, the divine blessing comes to the soul; therefore hear, and your soul shall live. Our Lord and King, who made the ear, has a right to demand its attention to his voice. Some men have no ears to hear truth, but quick ears for falsehood. We should be grateful if the Lord has given us spiritual perception; for “the hearing ear and the seeing eye” are from the Lord.

16-19. *But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.*

Our Lord condemns the folly of the age in which he lived. The people would not listen to the messenger of God whoever he might be, but raised childish objections. Therefore the Lord likens them to “children sitting in the markets”,

who were asked to play by their fellows, but they could never agree upon the game. If certain of the children would imitate a wedding, and began to pipe, the others would not dance; and when they proposed a funeral, and began to mourn, the others would not lament. They were disagreeable, sullen, and captiously resolved to reject every offer.

Such was the foolish manner of men in our Lord's time. John was an ascetic: he must be out of his mind and under the influence of a demon. Jesus is a man among men, and goes to their feasts: he is accused of eating and drinking to excess, and associating with the sordid and wicked. There was no pleasing them. Thus is it at this hour: one preacher, who speaks with elegant diction, is too flowery; and another, who uses plain speech, is vulgar: the instructive preacher is dull, and the earnest preacher is far too excitable. There is no suiting some people. Even the great Lord of all finds his wise arrangements met with discontent.

Yet wisdom, after all, gave forth her teachings by rightly chosen ambassadors. She is justified of her children. Her children recognized the fitness of her messengers; and her messengers, who were also her children, were a credit to her choice, and justified her selection and preparation of them. The All-wise God is a better judge of what a minister should be than any of us are. Well did George Herbert write —

"Judge not the preacher, he is thy judge."

The varied orders of preachers are all needful, and, if we would but know it, they are all ours; whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas; and it is ours not to cavil at them, but to give earnest heed to their proposals.

Lord, deliver us from a captious, fault-finding spirit; for if we begin objecting, we are apt to keep on at it. If we will not hear one preacher, we may soon find ourselves quite weary of a second and a third, and before long it may come to pass that we cannot hear any minister to profit.

20. *Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not.*

Some cities were more favored with the Lord's presence than others, and

therefore he looked for more from them. These cities ought to have repented, or Christ would not have upbraided them: repentance is a duty. The more men hear and see of the Lord's work, the greater is their obligation to repent. Where most is given most is required. Men are responsible for the way in which they treat the Lord Jesus and "his mighty works."

There is a time for upbraiding: "Then began he." The most loving preacher will see cause for complaining of his impenitent hearers: HE upbraids, even he who also wept. Repentance is what we who are preachers drive at; and where we do not see it, we are sore troubled. Our trouble is not that our hearers did not applaud our ability, but because they repented not. They have enough to repent of, and without repentance woe is upon them, and therefore we mourn that they do not repent.

21. *Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.*

Jesus knew what the doom of certain Jewish towns would be; and he knew what certain heathen cities would have done if they had been placed in their favorable circumstances.

He spoke infallibly. Great privileges were lost on Chorazin and Bethsaida, but would have been effectual had they been granted to Tyre and Sidon. According to our Lord's declaration, God gave the opportunity where it was rejected. and it was not given where it would have been accepted. This is true, but how mysterious! The practical point was the guilt of these favored cities, in that they remained unmoved by visitation which would have converted the heathen Sidonians; yes, and would have made them repent quickly "long ago"; and in the most humiliating manner, "in sackcloth and ashes." It is a sad fact that our impenitent hearers do despite to a grace which would have brought cannibals to the Savior's feet!

22. *But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of Judgment, than for you.*

Terrible as the hell of these two sinful cities will be, their punishment will be

more bearable than the sentence passed on cities of Galilee where Jesus taught and wrought miracles of love. The sin is in proportion to the light. Those who perish with salvation sounding in their ears perish with a vengeance. Assuredly the day of judgment will be notable for surprises. Who would have thought to see Bethsaida sink lower than Sidon? Believers will not in the day of judgment be surprised, for they will remember in that day our Lord's "I say unto you."

23. *And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.*

The warning to Capernaum is, if possible, still more emphatic, for Sodom was actually destroyed by fire from heaven. Capernaum, his own city, the head-quarters of the army of salvation, had seen and heard the Son of God: he had done in it that which even Sodomites would have felt; and yet it remained unmoved. Those foul sinners of the accursed Sodom, had they beheld the miracles of Christ, would have so forsaken their sins that their city would have been spared. Jesus knew that it would have been so; and therefore he mourned to see Capernaum remain as hardened as ever. Because of this rejection of special privilege, the city which had been exalted unto heaven would be brought as low in punishment as it had been raised high in privilege. May none of our favored English race perish in the same condemnation! Alas, how much we fear that millions of them will do so!

24. *But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.*

What Sodom will endure when the great Judge of all appoints the doom of the wicked, we may not try to realize; but it will be somewhat less than the penalty inflicted upon those who have sinned against the light, and rejected the testimony of the Lord from heaven. To reject the gospel of the Son of God-is to create for one's self a sevenfold hell. Here, again, our Lord speaks from his own full authority, with "I say unto you." He speaks what he knows: he will himself be the Judge.

So far our Lord spake in heaviness of heart; but his brow cleared when he came

to the glorious doctrine of election in the next verse.

25, 26. *At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight.*

He turned to the other-side of truth. “Jesus answered”: one doctrine answers to another: sovereign grace is the answer to abounding guilt. With rejoicing spirit Jesus sees how sovereign grace meets the unreasonable aboundings of human sin, and chooses out its own, according to the good pleasure of the Father’s will. Here is the spirit in which to regard the electing grace of God: “I thank thee.” It is cause for deepest gratitude. Here is the author of election: “O Father.” It is the Father who makes the choice, and reveals the blessings. Here is his right to act as he does: he is “Lord of heaven and earth.” Who shall question the good pleasure of his will? Here we see the objects of election, under both aspects; the chosen and the passed-over. Babes see because sacred truths are revealed to them, and not otherwise. They are weak and inexperienced. They are simple and unsophisticated. They can cling and trust, and cry, and love; and to such the Lord opens up the treasures of wisdom. The objects of divine choice are such as these. Lord, let me be one among them! The truths of the heavenly kingdom are hid, by a judicial act of God, from men who, in their own esteem, are “the wise and prudent.” They cannot see, because they trust their own dim light, and will not accept the light of God.

Here we see, also, the reason of election, the divine will: “So it seemed good in thy sight.” We can go no further than this. The choice seemed good to Him who never errs, and therefore it is good. This stands to the children of God as the reason which is above all reason. Deus vult is enough for us. If God wills it, so must it be, and so ought it to be.

27. *All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*

Here we have the channel through which electing love works towards men: “All

things are delivered unto me of my Father." All things are put into the Mediator's hands; fit hands both towards God and towards man; for he alone knows both to perfection. Jesus reveals the Father to the babes whom he has chosen. Only the Father can fill the Son with benediction, and only through the Son can that benediction flow to any one of the race of men. Know Christ, and you know the Father, and know that the Father himself loveth you. There is no other way of knowing the Father but through the Son. In this our Lord rejoiced; for his office of Mediator is dear to him, and he loves to be the way of communication between the Father whom he loves, and the people whom he loves for the Father's sake.

Observe the intimate fellowship between the Father and the Son, and how they know each other as none else ever can. Oh, to see all things in Jesus by the Father's appointment, and so to find the Father's love and grace in finding Christ.

My soul, there are great mysteries here! Enjoy what thou canst not explain.

28. *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Here is the gracious invitation of the gospel in which the Savior's tears and smiles were blended, as in a covenant rainbow of promise.

"Come"; he drives none away: he calls them to himself. His favorite word is "Come." Not, — go to Moses, "Come unto me." To Jesus himself we must come, by a personal trust. Not to doctrine, ordinance, or ministry are we to come first; but to the personal Savior. All laboring and laden ones may come: he does not limit the call to the spiritually laboring, but every working and wearied one is called. It is well to give the largest sense to all that mercy speaks. Jesus calls me. Jesus promises "rest", as his gift: his immediate, personal, effectual rest he freely gives to all who come to him by faith.

To come to him is the first step, and he entreats us to take it. In himself, as the great sacrifice for sin, the conscience, the heart, the understanding obtain complete rest. When we have obtained the rest he gives, we shall be ready to hear of a further rest which we find.

29, 30. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*

“Take my yoke, and learn”: this is the second instruction; it brings with it a further rest which we “find.” The first rest he gives through his death; the second we find in copying his life. This is no correction of the former statement, but an addition thereto. First, we rest by faith in Jesus, and next we rest through obedience to him. Rest from fear is followed by rest from the turbulence of inward passion, and the drudgery of self. We are not only to bear a yoke, but his yoke; and we are not only to submit to it when it is laid upon us, but we are to take it upon us. We are to be workers, and take his yoke; and at the same time we are to be scholars, and learn from him as our Teacher. We are to learn of Christ and also to learn Christ. He is both teacher and lesson. His gentleness of heart fits him to teach, to be the illustration of his own teaching, and to work in us his great design. If we can become as he is, we shall rest as he does. We shall not only rest from the guilt of sin — this he gives us; but we shall rest in the peace of holiness, which we find through obedience to him. It is the heart which makes or mars the rest of the man. Lord, make us “lowly in heart”, and we shall be restful of heart.

“Take my yoke.” The yoke in which we draw with Christ must needs be a happy one; and the burden which we carry for him is a blessed one. We rest in the fullest sense when we serve, if Jesus is the Master. We are unloaded by bearing his burden; we are rested by running on his errands.

“Come unto me”, is thus a divine prescription, curing our ills by the pardon of sin through our Lord’s sacrifice, and causing us the greatest peace by sanctifying us to his service.

Oh for grace to be always coming to Jesus, and to be constantly inviting others to do the same! Always free, yet always bearing his yoke; always having the rest once given, yet always finding more: this is the experience of those who come to Jesus always, and for everything. Blessed heritage; and it is ours!

Matthew 12

1. *At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began, to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto to him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.*

They were probably on their way to the synagogue. They were allowed by law to take ears of corn as they passed along; but the objection of the Pharisees was to their doing so on the Sabbath. Plucking was reaping, rubbing the grain from the husk was threshing, to their hypercritical minds. Their traditions and fancies they regarded as a code of law, and according to this the disciples were doing "that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day." They came to Jesus himself with their grave complaints: for once they plucked up courage to deal with the Leader; for they felt very strong on the Sabbath question, and they thought it fair to lay the faults of the disciples at the door of their Teacher.

We incidentally learn from this story that our Lord and his disciples were poor, and that he who fed the multitudes did not use his miraculous power to feed his own followers, but left them till they did what poor men are forced to do to supply a little stay for their stomachs. Our Lord bribes none into following him: they may be his apostles, and yet be hungry on a Sabbath.

Why did not these Pharisees give them bread, and so prevent their doing that to which they objected? We might also fairly ask, How came they to see the disciples? Did they not break the Sabbath by setting a watch over them?

3, 4. *But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for*

him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

He speaks to his learned opponents as if they had not read the law which they professed to uphold. “Have ye not read?” The instance of David served the Son of David well. It was clear from his example that necessity has no law. The Tabernacle law was broken by David when he and his band were pressed with hunger; and that breach of law touched Jewish ritual in a very special and tender point, and yet he was never rebuked for it. To have eaten the holy bread out of profanity, or bravado, or levity, might have involved the offender in the judgment of death; but to do so in urgent need was not blameworthy in the case of David. As men excuse any breach of manners necessitated by the pressure of hunger, so cloth the Lord permit any ceremonial point of law to give way to his mercy, and to man’s evident necessity. The law of the Sabbath was never meant to compel starvation to hungry men, any more than the law of “the house of God” and “the shewbread.” Works of necessity are lawful on the Sabbath.

5, 6. *Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless, But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.*

This instance is absolutely to the point. The priests worked hard on the Sabbath in offering sacrifice, and in other appointed ways; but they were to be honored rather than censured for so doing, seeing they had the approval of the temple law. But in the case of Christ’s disciples, that which they did had the sanction of the temple’s Lord, who is far greater than the temple. Work done for God on the Sabbath is no real profanation of the Sabbath, though it may seem to be so to those whose religion lies wholly in external observances. If we work with Jesus, and for Jesus, we care not for the criticisms of formalists. As the substance is greater than the shadow, so is our Lord greater than the temple, or any or all ceremonial laws; and his sanction overrules all the interpretations of the law which asceticism or superstition may thrust upon us.

7. *But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.*

Our Lord had galled the Pharisees by saying twice, “Have ye not read?” Did he imagine that they had left any part of the Psalms or Law unread? Now he assails them again with the charge of ignorance of the meaning of a passage from the prophets: “If ye had known what this meaneth.” Then he quotes from Hosea 6:6, which he had used against them before. (See chapter 9:13.) “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” There must be very much in this word of the prophet to make it so great a favorite with our Lord. God preferred that his priests should rather give the consecrated shewbread to David as an act of mercy, than keep it sacred to its use: he would rather that the disciples should spend a few minutes in plucking ears of corn for their hunger than suffer faintness in order to preserve the sanctity of the day. Having thus the permit of the Lord himself, those who allowed the merciful act of removing hunger were guiltless, and ought not to be condemned. Indeed, they would not have been condemned had their critics been better instructed.

Works of mercy are lawful on the Sabbath.

8. *For the Son of man is lord even of the sabbath day.*

This sets the whole matter beyond further question. “The Son of man”, Christ Jesus, being in union with the Godhead, “is Lord” of everything which lies in the range of that law which concerns God and man, seeing he is Mediator; and therefore he may arrange and dispose of Sabbaths as he pleases. He has done so, and has interpreted the Sabbatic law, not with license, but with a sweet reasonableness which the more rigid of religionists do not exhibit. From his example and teaching we learn that the Sabbath is not profaned by works of necessity, piety, or mercy; and that we need not care for the sharp speeches of hypercritical formalists who strain the Sabbatic law, and make a bondage of that which was intended to be a season of holy rest.

9. *And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue. The time arrived when the Sabbath question came up again in reference to our Lord’s own work among the sick and diseased.*

Jesus set the example of attending public worship. The synagogues had no divine appointment to authorize them, but in the nature of things it must be right and good to meet for the worship of God on his own day, and therefore Jesus

was there. He had nothing to learn, yet he went up to the assembly on the day which the Lord God had hallowed.

10. *And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.*

The incident was noteworthy, and therefore it is mentioned with a “behold.” It was remarkable that so very soon a case occurred to bring up again the matter in dispute. Did the Pharisees bring the man with the withered hand into the synagogue so as to raise the question in a practical form? They went to the synagogue to indulge their bigotry and not to worship: it is to be feared that many in these days imitate then,. Before our Lord made any motion towards a miracle, they were at him with what they hoped would prove an entangling question. “Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days?” He had claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath; and now they, with much show of fairness, submit a difficulty to him, but it was with a base purpose. In the moral character of questioning, everything depends upon the motive they did not ask that they might learn from him, but “that they might accuse him.” They were on the catch; yet they took nothing by their malicious craft.

11, 12. *And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold of, it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.*

He answers their question by another. He propounds a case, and makes them to be judges in it. If a poor man, with “one sheep”, saw it fall “into a pit”, or become cast on its back “on the sabbath”, would he not “lay hold on it, and lift it out”, and set it on its feet? Of course he would; and he would be right in so doing. How much then is a man better than a sheep? therefore it is and must be right to succor a man. Alas, some act as if a man were not better than an animal; for their dogs and horses are better housed than their laborers, and they are more indignant about the killing of a fox than at the starving of a pauper.

Our Lord's argument was overwhelming. One form of human kindness being proved to be right, the whole class of beneficent actions is admitted, and "it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days." One wonders that anybody ever thought otherwise. But zeal for externals, and hatred of spiritual religion, when united, create a narrow bigotry as cruel as it is ridiculous. Our Lord has set us free from the Rabbinical yoke, and we find rest unto our souls in a true spiritual Sabbath. Let none, however, from this liberty, infer a license, and treat the Lord's-day as if it were their own, and might be spent for their own purposes. They best keep the Sabbath who on the seventh day, and always, rest from their own works, as God did from his; but how can a man rest until he knows the finished work of God in Christ Jesus?

13. *Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.*

Thus our Lord practically carried out his own teaching. He that could work a miracle of this sort was divine, and could rightly interpret his own law. The man was sitting down, and Jesus bade him stand up that all might observe him; and then he further bade him hold up his hand so that all could see its lifeless condition. It does not appear that his arm was withered, as some have supposed; but he was able, by the use of his arm to hold out his hand to public view. This being done, the Lord restored it at once, before the whole synagogue, and before the captious Pharisees. The man stretched out each finger perfectly restored to its natural vigor. The poor man had hidden his hand when it was dried up; but when restored, it was meet that it should be seen by all in the synagogue. By that restored hand, made whole on the sabbath, all men knew that Jesus would work deeds of mercy on the sabbath. Let us pray him to do the same in our assemblies. Oh, that the hands which have been useless for holy purposes may at his bidding become whole! Oh, that those who are bidden to believe and live would cease from questioning, and obey, as this man did; then would healing his surely come to them, as it did to the obedient man!

14. *Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.*

The synagogue was too hot for the Pharisees, and so they went out. Utterly routed, they retire from public gaze, hating the man who had so completely

baffled them. They could not silence him, and so they would slay him. Those who begin with seeking to accuse the Lord soon come to seeking to destroy him. It was not easy to touch one who lived so much in the esteem of the people, and so they consulted together as to the safest method of procedure. Their killing of Jesus was indeed the result of malice aforethought, for they deliberately, planned their cruel deed. Men at this hour still take counsel "against him." Why and wherefore? Let their own consciences answer, if they have any. The present cool, calculating attacks of skeptics upon the gospel have a special degree of crime in them.

15, 16. *But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them, all; and charged them, that they should not make him known.*

Their secret counsels were all discerned by his omniscience: Jesus knew it. He acted accordingly. He came not to contend with cavilers, and therefore he withdrew himself from the scene of their perpetual disputations. But he could not get alone; the crowd flocked after him, and his love could not refuse to bless them with healing. He did not want to create an excitement, and so, when the people gathered in multitudes, he commanded them not to advertise his presence. To him popularity became a hindrance in his work, and he shunned it. In this avoidance of notoriety he fulfilled an ancient prophecy.

We are under no charge to conceal his gracious wonders, and therefore we would joyfully enlarge upon that glorious record, "He healed them all." What an encouragement to sin-sick souls to bunt in him!

17-19. *That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets.*

It is in Isaiah 42:1-4 that we read words which are quoted in their full sense, if not literally, by the Evangelist. The Servant of God, elect, beloved, and delightsome to the Lord, clothed with the Spirit of God, would come forth, and

reveal the Lord's mind to the nations; but it would not be with tumult and turmoil, noise and clamor.

To avoid contention and ostentation, our Lord quieted those whom he had healed, or at least charged them not to make him known. Our Lord did not aim at raising himself in the esteem of the multitude by successfully contending with the Pharisees; for his method was of another sort. The names given to the Savior here are exceedingly precious, and worthy of our careful meditation, and especially so in connection with the passage in Isaiah. Jesus is the chosen of Jehovah, ordained to be his servant, beloved in that capacity, and well pleasing to his Father. The power of this beloved Servant of God would lie in the divine Spirit, in the doctrine which he would teach, and in the law which he would proclaim; his whole life being a judging and condemnation of sin before the eyes of all men. Not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord, and the force of truth, would he prevail. The wrath of man in hot controversy, the frenzy of wild rhetoric, the torrent of popular declamation; all these he left to mere pretenders: he disdained such weapons in establishing his Kingdom. Certain of his followers have taken an opposite course, and are much enamored of clamorous and blatant methods: in this they will yet find that they are not well pleasing to the Lord.

20. *A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory.*

He left the bruised raced of Pharisaic presence to prove its own impotence, it was not at that time worth his while to break it; and the smoking flax of a nominal religiousness he passed by, and left all dealing with it till another day, when the hour should come to end its offensiveness. He will in the end victoriously judge those hypocrites who were useless as bruised reeds, and offensive as smoking flax; but he would not do this during his first mission to men. He is in no haste to destroy every petty opposition.

This I take to be the exact sense of the words in this connection; but as the passage is popularly received, it is equally true, and much richer in consolation. The feeblest are not disdained by our Lord Jesus, though apparently useless as a bruised reed, or even actually offensive as a smoking flax. He is gentle, and exercises no harsh severity. He bears and forbears with those who are unlovely in his eyes. He longs to bind up the broken reed, and fan the smoking, flax into

flaming life. Oh, that poor sinners would remember this, and trust him!

21. *And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.*

Because he is so kind, the despised Gentile dogs shall come and crouch at his feet and love him as their Master. He shall be the hope of those who were left as hopeless. Our Lord's desire for quiet, and his avoiding antagonism, thus proved him to be the Messiah of the prophets. Shall we not more and more trust in the Anointed of the Lord? Yes, Gentiles as we are, we do trust in his name. In us is this prophecy fulfilled Yet how unlikely it seemed that Gentiles would do so when Israel refused him.

22. *Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.*

It is well when men take to bringing others to Jesus: good is sure to come of it. An extraordinary case exhibited a novel form of the handicraft of Satan. The evil spirit had secured himself by stopping up the windows and the door of the soul: the victim was blind and dumb. How could he escape? He could not see his Savior, nor cry to him. But the double evil vanished when, in an instant, Jesus dislodged the demon: "the blind and dumb both spake and saw." When Satan is dethroned, the spiritual faculties begin to work at once. Nothing baffles our Lord. Men who neither see their sin, nor cry for mercy, his grace can save.

Lord, be with us when we preach, and cast out devils by thy Word; then shall moral inability be succeeded by gracious health.

23. *And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?*

Again and again we have noticed their astonishment; and here a question was asked which may have been the footfall of coming faith in many. Our Revised Version very properly leaves out the "not." It was natural for the translators to put it in, for it looks as if many must have seen the true Solomon in this great Wonderworker. But as it is not in the original, we must not allow the "not"; and

then the question shows how strangely unbelieving they were, and yet how some conviction forced itself on them. “Is he? He cannot be; he must be; but is he? Is this the Son of David?” There were various voices, yet the people were one in their wonderment: all the people were amazed!

24. *But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.*

This was their former concoction It was old and stale, yet for lack of a better or more bitter suggestion, they stick to it. Our Lord was too busy to reply to the vile slander on its first appearance (Matthew 9:34); or perhaps he so loathed it that he would not touch it, but left the abominable thing to poison itself with its own venom. Now they bring it out again, and come to minuter detail of lying by mentioning Beelzebub as the name of the prince of the devils, with whom he was in league. Lies grow as they move on. Those who doubt God’s work in the conversion of sinners, soon advance in hardihood, and ascribe the blessed change to hypocrisy, self-interest, madness, or some other evil influence.

25, 26. *And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?*

The Thought-reader meets them with an argument in the highest degree conclusive, overwhelming them by reducing their statement to absurdity. Imagine Satan divided against Satan, and his kingdom thus rent with civil war! No: whatever faults the devils have, they are not at strife with each other; that fault is reserved for the servants of a better Master. Oh, that divisions in the church were not so many, and so desolating as they are! It would be a very hopeful circumstance if we could hear of divisions among the powers of darkness; for then would Satan’s kingdom fall. No, ye cunning Pharisees; your slanderous suggestion is too manifestly a lie, and reasonable men are not to be entrapped by it!

27. *And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children*

cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.

Our Lord here used an argument fitted for the men he dealt with. It was not so forcible in itself as the former one, but as an argument to them it would come home with singular force. Some of the disciples of the Pharisees, and probably some of their children, acted as exorcists; and, whether truly or falsely, professed to cast out devils. If Jesus wrought this marvel by Beelzebub, and the Pharisees had made that discover, how could they have learned it better than from their own sons? Did their sons have dealings with the demon-prince? This would impale them on the horns of a dilemma, and prevent their uttering that malicious invention again, for the sake of their own friends.

28. *But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God then the kingdom of God is come unto you.*

Our Lord in effect says — If I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then is a new era begun: the divine power has come into distinct conflict with the evil one, and is manifestly victorious. In my person is "the kingdom of God" inaugurated, and you are placed in a position of gracious advantage by my being among you. But if the devils be not cast out by the Spirit of God, the throne of God is not among you, and you are grievous losers. The overthrow of evil is a clear proof that the kingdom of grace has come.

Note that, though our Lord had power all his own, he honored the Spirit of God, and worked by his energy, and mentioned the fact that he did so. What can we do without that Spirit? Lord God the Holy Ghost, teach us to wait on thee!

29. *Or else-how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.*

The devil is the strong man, the giant robber. He holds men in possession as a warrior horde his property. There is no getting his goods from him without first encountering himself. The bare idea of spoiling him while you are his friend, or he is unsubdued, is ridiculous. Our Lord, when his work began, bound Satan: the presence of God in human flesh was a restraint upon man's foe. Having bound

the enemy, he now takes out of his house those spoils which else had been for ever in his possession. There is no deliverance for us save by our Lord's victory over our powerful tyrant. Glory be to his name, he has bound the mighty, and he takes from him his prey! This was our Lord's fair and self-evident explanation of the matter concerning which Pharisees theorized so basely.

30. *He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*

Our Lord had made no compromise with Satan. Satan was not with him but against him. He meant to be equally decisive in his dealings with all other parties. Men must either come to his side, or be reckoned as his opponents; there can be no middle course. Jesus meant war with the great enemy, and with all who sided with evil. Men would of necessity practically take sides: their actions would tend to gather to him or to scatter from him. Jesus is the one and only possible center of human unity; and whatever teaching does not unite men in him, disperses them through selfishness, pride, hate, and a thousand other disintegrating forces. Our King has thrown down the gage of battle, and he will never accept truce or compromise. Lord, let me never hesitate, but be with thee, and gather with thee.

31. *Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.*

Here is a solemn warning for these slanderous Pharisees: the sin of reviling the Spirit of God, and imputing his work to Beelzebub, is a very great one; and, in fact, so hardens the heart that men who are guilty of it never repent, and consequently are never forgiven. Our Lord let his opponents see whither they were drifting: they were on the verge of a sin for which no pardon would be possible. We must be very tender in our conduct towards "the Holy Ghost"; for his honor has a special guard set about it by such a solemn text as this.

32. *And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to*

come.

Why should a word be spoken against Jesus? Yet many words are so spoken, and he forgives. But when it comes to willfully confounding the Holy Spirit with the evil spirit, the offense is rank, and heinous, and most hardening to the heart. In no state of the divine economy was it ever possible to extend forgiveness to one who willfully regarded God himself as in league with the devil. This is spiritual death, nay, rottenness and corruption of the most putrid kind. It is no error, but a wicked, willful blasphemy of the Holy Ghost which dares to impute his works of grace and power to diabolical agency. He who is guilty of this outrageous crime has sinned himself into a condition in which spiritual feeling is dead, and repentance has become morally impossible.

33. *Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit.*

Still he argues with the Pharisees, and as good as says, “Be consistent; accept me and my works, or reject me and my works; for by my works only can you Judge me. But do not admit the work to be a good one, and then charge me with being in league with the devil in the doing of it. If I were in league with the devil, I should do works such as the devil does, and not works which shake his kingdom.” The expostulation is most powerful, because it is founded in righteousness: we judge a tree by its fruits, and a man by his actions, and there is no other truthful mode of judging.

Read the words out of their connection and they teach the great general truth that the inner and the outer life must correspond.

34, 35. *O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*

Our Lord accuses them of “being evil.” He repeats John’s words, “O generation of vipers!” They had spoken evil: how could they do otherwise when their hearts

were so full of malice towards him? They had gone to the utmost extreme of malevolence in charging him with being in league with Satan, and that only showed what a treasure of evil lay within their hearts. They threw evil forth with energy of temper, and with lavishness of falsehood, because they had such a fullness of it within. That which is in the well comes up in the bucket. The heart betrays itself through the mouth. Had they been good, their words would have been good; but such was their baseness of heart, that they could not "speak good things." Thus our Lord carried the war into their own territory, and flashed holy indignation in their faces.

36, 37. *But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*

They might think that they had done no great wrong when they scattered their black phrases among the people: they had only given their opinion with more or less of levity; at the worst, they had only spoken "idle words." Thus they would make light of what they had done now that the Lord had most completely crushed them. But our Lord drives them out of this retreat. He deals strictly with such gross offenders. Words are to be accounted for at the last great day. Words prove men just, or worthy of condemnation. Their very works may be judged by their words. There is a something very heart-revealing about men's language, and especially about those words which spring from deep-seated passion. We may, when we are convicted of unjust speech, shield ourselves behind the notion that our bark was worse than our bite, and that we merely said so and so, and hardly meant it to be taken so seriously; but the plea will not avail us. We must mind what we say about godly men, and especially about their Lord; for libelous words will live, and will be swift witnesses against us in the day of judgment, when we shall find that they were all recorded in the book of God.

Surely this business of charging the Lord Jesus with being in league with Satan was never likely to be heard of again while he lived! He had silenced that form of slander once for all, as far as the Pharisees were concerned.

Dear Master, help me to bridle my tongue, that I be not found guilty of idle words; and teach me when to speak, that I may keep equally clear of idle silence.

38, 39. *Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.*

The Pharisees change their manner, but they are in pursuit of the same object. How hopeless had the religionists of that age become! Nothing would convince them. They manifest their hate of the Lord Jesus, by ignoring all the wonders he had wrought. What further signs could they seek than those he had already given? Pretty inquirers these! They treat all the miracles of our Lord as if they had never occurred. Well might the Lord call them "evil and adulterous", since they were so given to personal lasciviousness, and were spiritually so untrue to God. We have those among us now who are so uncandid as to treat all the achievements of evangelical doctrine as if they were nothing, and talk to us as if no result had followed the preaching of the gospel. There is need of great patience to deal wisely with such.

40. *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man he three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

The great sign of our Lord's mission is his resurrection, and his preparing gospel of salvation for the heathen. His life-story is well symbolized by that of Jonah. They cast our Lord overboard, even as the sailors did the man of God. The sacrifice of Jonah calmed the sea for the mariners; our Lord's death made peace for us. Our Lord was a while in the heart of the earth as Jonah in the depth of the sea; but he rose again, and his ministry was full of the power of his resurrection. As Jonah's ministry was certified by his restoration from the sea, so is our Lord's ministry attested by his rising from the dead. The man who had come back from death and burial in the sea commanded the attention of all Nineveh, and so does the risen Savior demand and deserve the obedient faith of all to whom his message comes.

41. *The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of*

Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.

The heathen of Nineveh were convinced by the sign of a prophet restored from burial in the sea; and moved by that convincement, they repented at his preaching. Without cavil or delay they put the whole city in mourning, and pleaded with God to turn from his anger. Jesus came with a clearer command of repentance, and a brighter promise of deliverance; but he spoke to obdurate hearts. Our Lord reminds the Pharisees of this; and as they were the most Jewish of Jews, they were touched to the quick by the fact that heathens perceived what Israel did not understand, and that Ninevites repented while Jews were hardened. All men will rise at the judgment: "The men of Nineveh shall rise." The lives of penitents will condemn those who did not repent: the Ninevites will condemn the Jews, "because they repented at the preaching of Jonas," and the Jews did not. Those who heard Jonah and repented will be swift witnesses against those who heard Jesus and refused his testimony.

The standing witness to our Lord is his resurrection from the dead. God grant that every one of us, believing that unquestionable fact, may be so assured of his mission, that we may repent and believe the gospel.

RESURRECTION is one proof; in fact, it is THE SIGN; although, as we shall see, it is supplemented by another. The two will convince us or condemn us.

42. *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.*

The second sign of our Lord's mission is HIS KINGLY WISDOM. As the fame of Solomon brought the queen of the south from the uttermost parts of the earth, so does the doctrine of our Lord command attention from the utmost isles of the sea. If Israel perceives not his glorious wisdom, Ethiopia and Seba shall hear of it, and come bowing before him. The queen of Sheba will rise again, and will "rise up" as a witness against unbelieving Jews; for she journeyed far to hear Solomon, while they would not hear the Son of God himself who came into their midst. The superlative excellence of his wisdom stands for our Lord as a sign, which can never be effectually disputed. What other teaching meets all the wants

of men? Who else has revealed such grace and truth? He is infinitely greater than Solomon, who from a moral point of new exhibited a sorrowful littleness. Who but the Son of God could have made known the Father as he has done?

43. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.*

Well is the devil named “the unclean spirit”: he loves that which is foul, and makes the man in whom he dwells filthy in heart. In the incident described above, the devil has been in possession “of a man”, and he “is gone out” for purposes of his own. He has quitted the man of his own accord, without conflict of any kind. This is a case which frequently occurs: the devil does in this way leave the madly immoral to become decent and orderly. The crafty spirit takes the key of the house with him, for he means to return. He has quitted occupancy, but has not given up ownership. He has gone out that he might not be turned out. Who can understand the subtlety of the old serpent?

The evil spirit is, however, uneasy when he is not ruling a human mind. He wanders seeking rest and finding none He finds nothing to cheer him on this earth, or in heaven, or in hell; these are all dry places to him. Within the sinful heart he was at home, and found some little content; but outside in nature he finds a desert for his unclean desires.

“Every prospect pleases
And only man is vile!”

And hence only man affords a suitable lodging for the vile spirit.

44. *Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.*

The foul fiend calls the man, “My house.” His audacity is amazing. He did not build or buy that house, and he has no right to it. He speaks of his leaving the man as a mere coming out: “I came out.” He says, as if it were an easy matter, “I will return.” Evidently he considers that he has the freehold of man’s nature, and can go and come at his pleasure. If Satan quits a man of his own will, he is sure to return just when it suits his purpose. Only the divine force which ejects him

can secure his non-return. Reformations which are not the work of conquering grace are usually temporary, and often lead up to a worse condition in after years.

The unclean spirit carries out his resolve: he returns, “and when he is come, he findeth it empty”: no one else has taken possession, and so no one hinders his entrance into his own tenement. It is true it is swept from certain grosser sins, and garnished with some pretty moralities; but the Holy Spirit is not there, and no divine change has been wrought, and therefore the unclean spirit is as much at home there as ever he was. The parable needs no further explanation; temporary reformation is well pictured. The devil has no objection to his house being swept and garnished; for a moralist may be as truly his slave as the man of debauched habits. So long as the heart is not occupied by his great foe, and he can use the man for his own purposes, the adversary of souls will let him reform as much as he pleases.

45. *Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.*

He takes another walk; he is so pleased with his elegant mansion that he calls upon other demons and invites them to his garnished home. The evil ones join him, and the inhabitants of the house are as eight to one of their former number. They “enter in and dwell there”: they take the fullest possession and make a permanent stay. Their residence is secured beyond future likelihood of removal; and now the man is worse than at the first; for the unclean spirits are more numerous and more wicked. The sinful man becomes more proud, and more unbelieving, or he becomes more vicious and more blasphemous than at the beginning. So much for a hopeful reformation, which indeed from the very first was hopeless, because Jesus was not there, and the Holy Spirit had no hand in it. Cunningly the unclean spirit submits to an apparent giving up of power that he may establish his dominion the more firmly. No doubt, relapses into sin are, like relapses in disease, even more dangerous than the original malady.

In Christ’s day the Pharisees and others were in this case. The spirit which led the Jews to idolatry was gone, but the true God was not spiritually loved nor even known; and so the demon power held them still in possession. In the future,

even in that wicked generation, in the form of hatred to Christ, and fanatical contempt of other nations, the evil spirit which had depraved Judaism, would yet display itself in a still more hideous shape; as it did from our Lord's day and onward till the destruction of Jerusalem, when the race seemed to have gone fairly mad, under a diabolical influence which made them "hateful, and hating one another." We may fear that our present age of "culture" and advancement will go onward till it reaches a similar goal. It is progressing towards infidelity, and advancing towards absurdity; while at the same time worldliness is rampant, and holiness is ridiculed.

46. *While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.*

The members of his family had come to take him, because they thought him beside himself. No doubt the Pharisees had so represented his ministry to his relatives that they thought they had better restrain him, lest he should procure his own destruction by his zealous preaching. Friends may be a good man's greatest hindrance. They intruded upon his holy service "while he yet talked to the people." A mark of wonder is put before this record: "Behold." How dare they act in this manner? By the request of his mother and his brethren he is called away from the pressing engagement of teaching the people, which was his urgent lifework; but the call had no power over him. What ailed Mary that she joined in this transaction? Many a nervous mother has been ready to hold back her consecrated son when his courage has defied danger. Our Lord did not allow his love to his mother to turn him aside.

47. *Then one said unto him, Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to speak with thee.*

An officious person reported the errand of the family: one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without. It is hard when interruptions come from our own flesh and blood; for strangers are sure to back them up. Ignorantly or willfully, the reporting person lent himself to the design of the relatives by representing that they were desiring to speak with him; though, indeed, they desired to take him. He who would not permit a disciple to neglect his duty on the plea of burying his father, how will he act now that his mother comes to hinder him? He will do the right thing. We may always find the rule of our

conduct by asking the question, “What would Jesus do?”

48, 49. *But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!*

He does not reject the tender ties of his human nature, but he exhibits their true position as secondary to the spiritual bonds which united him to the spiritual family. Those who were related to him by the bonds of discipleship had in this the truest union with him. He pointed to “his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!” All believers in Jesus are of the royal family, princes of the blood, brothers of the Christ. See how he owns the affinity, and bids all know it. “He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” In this instance his method of acknowledging them was singularly striking; he even set them before his earthly mother and brethren.

Lord, let us know and enjoy our nearness to thyself. Help us also to care for thee as a mother for her son, and to love thee as a man should love his own brother.

50. *For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*

He enlarges upon the truth. Every doer of the Father’s will is thereby proved to be a true disciple, and he is to Jesus as near as a brother, as dear as a sister, as much cared for as mother. According to our condition and capacity, let us act towards our Lord the part of brother in help, of sister in sympathy, of mother in tender love; for all these relationships act in both ways, and involve giving as well as receiving. What a blessed “whosoever” is this! It is not for ministers only, or for persons set apart to special service; but all who do the Father’s will in any position of life are encompassed in the family circle of the Lord Christ.

Our Lord Jesus had a little while before cut himself adrift from the bands of formality by routing the scribes and Pharisees, and now the knife goes deeper, and all that is of the flesh at its very best is divided from that which is of the spirit. Henceforth it is clear that after the flesh he knows no man any more; neither can we hope to know him by birth-right membership, or anything else that is of blood, or birth, or of the will of the flesh. The inner life which is akin to

God, and shows itself in holiness, is that which gives us union with our Lord. Oh, to feel its influence more and more!

Matthew 13

1. *The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side.*

He was not afraid of being seized by his family, but freely went abroad. How serene was his behavior. He “sat by the sea side”: this must have been a great relief to him. He ceased from the controversy of the house and the street, and came into restful communion with nature. On the beach, in the open air, he gave greater play to his imagination, and quitted the didactic style for the parabolical.

2. *And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that be went into a ship, and eat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.*

Great multitudes longed to hear his teaching, and see his miracles. These pressed upon him so eagerly that there was danger of his being pushed into the sea; and the more so because it was not a scattered crowd, but they were gathered together unto him—pressing about his person. The ship became his pulpit, and the little space between it and the shore gave him breathing-space, and enabled the more to hear him. The shelving beach and the blue sky would make a grand auditorium, with room for “the whole multitude”; a finely comprehensive expression. The teacher sat, and the people stood: we should have less sleeping in congregations if this arrangement still prevailed.

3. *And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow.*

He had much instruction to give, and he chose to convey it in parables. What wonderful pictures they were! for us, as well as for those who heard them! This parable of the sower is a mine of teaching concerning the kingdom; for the seed was “the word of the kingdom.” (See verse 19.)

“Behold!”: every word is worthy of attention. May be, the preacher pointed to a farmer on the shore, who was beginning to sow one of the terraces. “A sower”, read “The Sower.” Jesus, our Lord, has taken up this business of the Sower at his Father’s bidding. The sower “went forth.” See him leaving the Father’s house, with this one design upon his heart — “to sow.”

4. *And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side and the fowls came and devoured them up.*

When HE sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside: even when the Chief Sower is at work, some seed fails. We know he sows the best of seed, and in the best manner; but some of it falls on the trodden path, and so lies uncovered and unaccepted of the soil. That soil was hard, and beaten down with traffic. There, too, on the wayside, we meet with dust to blind, settlements of mud to foul, and birds to pilfer: it is not a good place for good seed. No wonder, as the seeds lay all exposed, that the fowls came and devoured them up. If truth does not enter the heart, evil influences soon remove it.

5, 6. *Some fell upon stony place, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up,they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away.*

Among the rocks, or on the shallow soil, with the unbroken rock-pan underneath, the seed fell; for if the sower had altogether avoided such places he might have missed some of the good ground. In these stony places the seed speedily sprang up because the rock gave it all the heat that fell on it, and so hastened its germination. But, soon up, soon down. When the time came for the sun to put forth his force, the rootless plants instantly pined and died. “They had no deepness of earth,” and “no root”; what could they do but wither quite away? Everything was hurried with them; the seeds had no time to root themselves, and so in hot haste the speedy growth met with speedy death. No trace remained.

7. *And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them.*

The ground was originally a thornbrake, and had been cleared by the thorns being cut down; but speedily the old roots sent out new shoots, and other weeds came up with them; and the tangled beds of thistles, thorns, nettles, and what not, strangled the feeble up-shootings of the wheat. The native plants choked the poor stranger. They would not permit the intrusive corn to share the field with them: evil claims a monopoly of our nature.

Thus we have seen three sots of seed come to an untimely end.

8. *But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.*

This would repay all losses, especially at the highest rate of increase here quoted. To the bird, the weather, and the weeds, three sets of seeds have gone; yet, happily, one remains to increase and fill the barn. The sowing of good seed can never be a total failure: “other fell into good ground.”

The harvest was not equally great on every spot of fertile soil: it varied from an hundredfold to thirtyfold. All good ground is not alike good; and, besides, the situation may differ. Harvests are not all alike in the same farm, in the same season, and under same farmer; and yet each field may yield a fairly good harvest.

Lord, if I cannot reach to a hundred fold, let me at least prove to be good ground by bearing thirtyfold.

9. *Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

It reminds one of the officer saying to his men, “Attention!” HE speaks, who, as Lord of all, has a right to be heard. Ears are for hearing: use them most when HE speaks who made the ear.

10. *And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?*

Perhaps the crowd had complained to the disciples that they could not see what

their Master was driving at The apostles may have felt unable to reply. As the matter perplexed them, they did well to enquire of their infallible Teacher, rather than to invent an explanatory theory, which might have been altogether a mistake.

11. *He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven but to them it is not given.*

The usual reasons for the use of parable would be to make truth clear, to arrest attention, and to impress teaching upon the memory. But in this instance our Lord was, by his parabolic speech, fulfilling the judicial sentence which had been long before pronounced upon the apostate nation among whom he received such unworthy treatment. They were doomed to have the light and to remain willfully in the dark. To his own disciples our Lord would explain the parable, but not to the outside unbelieving throng. If any one among the multitude became sincerely anxious to know the Lord's meaning, he would become his disciple, and then he would be taught "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven"; but those who rejected the Messiah would, while listening to parables, hear and not hear, see and not perceive.

To hear the outward word is a common privilege: "To know the mysteries" is a gift of sovereign grace. Our Lord speaks the truth with much boldness: "It is given unto you", "but to them it is not given." Solemn words. Humbling truths. Salvation, and the knowledge by which it comes, are given as the Lord wills. There is such a thing as distinguishing grace after all; let the moderns revile the doctrine as they may.

12. *For whoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.*

Those who had some understanding of spiritual truth would come to yet clearer light; but those who lived willfully in the dark, would, in the presence of light, become more and more bewildered, and would gain nothing but the discovery that they did not know what they thought they knew. An ignorant man going into a museum, or healing a learned lecture, only feels himself a greater fool. He

learns nothing, because he is not able to comprehend the elementary terms of the science. It is just so with carnal men; spiritual truth rather blinds them than enlightens them.

13. *Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, nether do they understand.*

This was his reason for speaking to them in parables; they could not understand spiritual things, and therefore he gave them no naked doctrine, for then they would not have listened at all. They did not really see what they saw, nor hear what they heard. The plainer the teaching, the more they were puzzled by it. They had become so morally and spiritually diseased. that the only thing they would notice was the attractive dress of a truth: for the truth itself they had no liking and no perception. To this day, marvels of creation, works of grace, deeds of providence, and ordinances of religion, are all as voiceless music, or painted suns, to carnal men: they hear not their teaching, they feel not their power.

14. *And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.*

That wonderful sixth chapter of Isaiah is constantly being quoted in the New Testament. How clearly it sets forth the doom of guilty Israel! Those who refuse to see are punished by becoming unable to see. The penalty of sin is to be left in sin. The Jews of our Lord’s day would trifle with what they heard, and so they were left to hear without understanding. Even the Messenger of the Covenant would speak in vain to them.

15. *For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

They had deadened their own faculties. Perversity in sin had made them heartless, and deaf, and blind to all spiritual things. Thus, they blocked up the

way of salvation against themselves, and used their utmost diligence to prevent their own conversion. It was but just that the truth should reach them in a manner which would condemn rather than convert. If it had come in any other form but the parabolic, they would not even have deigned to listen to it. In that form truth would have been more clearly seen than in any other if they had been willing to see it; but, as they were unwilling, the emblem became a dark lantern shutting the light from them. If men will willfully close their eyes, the very light shall blind them. Thus, when the Lord passes any by, it is due to their sin; but when he chooses any, it is not because they are better, but that he may make them better.

This passage teaches that the possession of faculties is a small thing unless we fitly use them. Men should "see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts." If they turn to Christ he will heal them, even of gross hearts, and dull ears, and closed eyes. But, alas! there is a generation which will not be converted; for they are proud of their blindness and grossness.

16, 17. *But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not see, them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

Happy men to be chosen to such a privilege! Grace has opened y our eyes and ears. Blessed are your eyes, for they see. What wonders, treasures, revelations do they see! Eyes are blessed which gaze upon the mysteries of divine love. Blessed are your ears, for they hear; hear something sweeter than the song of angels, even the voice of everlasting love from the heart of Jesus. You have learned the great secret; the counsel of the Lord has been revealed to you, and you are blessed. You under the gospel are made to know what the greatest and best of men under the law could not discover. The shortest day of summer is longer than the longest day in winter; and you, ye humble ones, under the gospel dispensation see more of truth in Jesus than the best of saints could see before he came. There is no doubt about this, for Jesus sets the seal of — "Verily I say unto you" upon the statement Favored above all others are those whose regenerated faculties both see and hear the truth of God. Are we among this blessed number? If so, let us praise the Lord for so great a boon. Truly to hear the gospel and to see its blessings is a high favor. The love and gratitude which

we show in return should be great indeed!

18. *Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.*

Because you see behind the curtain, and have grace given to discern the inner meaning through the outer metaphor, come and hear the explanation of the parable of the sower.

19. *When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside.*

The gospel is “the word of the kingdom”: it has royal authority in it; it proclaims and reveals King Jesus, and it leads men to obedience to his sway. To hear but not to understand, is to leave the good seed on the outside of your nature, and not to take it into yourself. Nothing can come of such hearing to anyone.

Satan is always on the watch to hinder the Word: “Then cometh the wicked one”, even at the moment when the seed fell. He is always afraid to leave the truth even in hard and dry contact with a mind, and so he catcheth it away at once, and it is forgotten, or even disbelieved. It is gone, at any rate; and we have not in our hearer’s mind a corn-field, but a highway, hard, and much frequented. The man was not an opposer, he “received seed”; but he received the truth as he was, without the soil of his nature being changed; and the seed remained as it was, till the foul bird of hell took it off the place, and there was an end of it. So far as the truth was sown in his heart, it was in his natural, unrenewed heart, and therefore it took no living hold. How many such hearers we have! To these we preach in vain; for what they learn they unlearn, and what they receive they reject almost as soon as it comes to them.

Lord, suffer none of us to be impervious to thy royal word; but whenever the smallest seed of truth falls on us, may we open our soul to it!

20, 21. *But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not*

root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by He is offended.

Here the seed was the same and the sower the same, but the result somewhat different. In this case there was earth enough to cover the seed, and heat enough to make it grow quickly. The convert was attentive, and easily persuaded; he seemed glad to accept the gospel at once, he was even eager and enthusiastic, joyful and demonstrative. He heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it. Surely this looked very promising! But the soil was essentially evil, hard, barren, superficial. The man had no living entrance into the mystery of the gospel, no root in himself, no principle, no hold of the truth with a renewed heart; and so he flourished hurriedly and showily for a season, and only for a season. It is tersely put, "He dureth for a while." That "while" may be longer or shorter according to circumstances. When matters grow hot with Christians, either through affliction from the Lord, or persecution from the world, the temporary believer is so sapless, so rootless, so deficient in moisture of grace, that he dries up, and his profession withers. Thus, again, the sower's hopes are disappointed, and his labor is lost. Till stony hearts are changed it must always be so. We meet with many who are soon hot and as soon cold. They receive the gospel "anon," and leave it "by-and-by." Everything is on the surface, and therefore is hasty and unreal. May we all have broken hearts and prepared minds, that when truth comes to us it may take root in us and abide.

22. *He also that received seed among the thorn is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.*

This class of hearers we know by personal acquaintance in this busy age. They hear the word, they are affected by the gospel, they take it as seed into their minds, and it grows well for a season; but the heart cannot belong to two absorbing objects at the same time, and therefore these men cannot long yield themselves up to the world and Christ too. Care to get money, covetousness, trickery, and sins which come from hasting to be rich, or else pride, luxury, oppression, and other sins which come of having obtained wealth, prevent the man from being useful in religious matters, or even sincere to himself: "and becometh unfruitful." He keeps his profession; he occupies his place; but his religion does not grow; in fact, it shows sad signs of being choked and checked

by worldliness. The leaf of outward religiousness is there, but there is no dew on it; the ear of promised fruit is there, but there are no kernels in it. The weeds have outgrown the wheat, and smothered it. We cannot grow thorn and corn at the same time: the attempt is fatal to a harvest for Jesus.

See how wealth is here associated with care, deceitfulness, and unfruitfulness. It is a thing to be handled with care. Why are men so eager to make their thorn-brake more dense with briars?

Would not a good husbandman root out the thorns and brambles? Should we not, as much as possible, keep free from the care to get, to preserve, to increase, and to hoard worldly riches? Our heavenly Father will see that we have enough; why do we fret about earthly things? We cannot give our minds to these things and to the kingdom also.

23. *But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.*

Here is the story of the Word's success. This fourth piece of land will repay all charges. Of course, no one parable teaches all truth, and therefore we have no mention here of the ploughing which always precedes a fruitful harvest. No heart of man is good by nature: the good Lord had made this plot into "good ground." In this case, both thought and heart are engaged about the heavenly message, and the man "heareth the word and understandeth it." By being understood lovingly, the truth gets into the man, and then it roots, it grows, it fruits, it rewards the sower. We must aim at the inward apprehension and comprehension of the Word of God; for only in this way can we be made fruitful by it.

Be it ours to aim to be among those who bear fruit an hundredfold! Ah, we would give our Lord ten thousandfold if we could. For every sermon we hear we should endeavor to do a hundred gracious, charitable, or self- denying acts. Our divine Sower, with such heavenly seed, deserves to be rewarded with a glorious harvest.

24. *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.*

Still to give us often the key-note of this gospel, our Lord speaks of “the kingdom of heaven”; and to continue his method of making truth so clear that only the willfully blind should fail to see it, he brings forth another plain and pregnant similitude. We know right well that “man which sowed good seed in his field,.” Right well he sowed it; he sowed it in his own chosen ground, “his field.” and right good was the seed he sowed. He is gone within his heavenly house, and has left his field to the care of his servants. Alas, that care is by no means what it should be!

25. *But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way.*

The servants are all too apt to sleep. There is a season when nature requires them to do so, and there are other times when sinful sloth persuades them to the same indulgence. Good, easy men, they cannot believe that anyone would do harm to their master’s field; besides, watching and driving away trespassers is unpleasant work. “Heresy-hunting” is the nickname for watchfulness. “Rigid Puritanism” is the contemptuous title for careful discipline. “Bigotry” is the title by which faithfulness is described. “While men slept” could any cultured person resist the spirit of the times, and keep awake?

“His enemy came”: we know who the enemy is. His time for work is in the night. He sleeps not when watchmen are steeped in slumber; but then is he specially active. Quietly, cunningly, without observation, that malicious one sowed the darnel, the bastard wheat; a something so like wheat that no one could tell the difference till they began to ripen. He brought in those who loved “modern thought”, and worldly amusements, who were by their talk Christian, and by their boasts profoundly spiritual; and having introduced them cunningly, he departed. He might have been suspected had he lingered upon the scene of his craft; and so he “went his way” to do the like elsewhere. His dear children all declared that he did not exist, but was a mere myth; and as he had gone away, many concluded that they were right. Satan is not omnipresent, but this he cunningly turns into an advantage, for he can often do more by his absence than by his presence. A known devil is only half a devil.

26. *But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.*

Good seed grows, and, alas! evil seed is equally full of the power to increase. Satan's principles have a terrible vitality and rigor in them. Both seeds were for a while hidden but when one "sprung up "the other "appeared also."

The darnel is up as soon as the wheat, and it looks so like it that it appears to be the selfsame thing. The field is ruined; its yield is poisoned by the mixture of a pernicious plant. What had the enemy gained for himself? Nothing: it was enough for him that he had injured the man he hated.

27. *So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares?*

Now they wake up: it had been better to have kept awake. They see the evil growth, though they did not see the evil sowing. Overwhelmed with the sight of the spoiled field, they hastened to tell their lord, wondering much how such a state of things could have come about. What a question to ask of their master: "Whence hath it tares?" They were sure that he sowed "good seed", and nothing else; and they evidently thought that he would know who sowed the bastard wheat. We, too, wonder how so much evil can have entered into a region wherein Christ has set his ministers, and we cry out in astonishment, "From whence then hath it tares?" The question is best left with the Master; but the asking it is a confession that we have been asleep.

28. *He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?*

The householder had not slept. He knew who had done the cruel wrong. He who is the enemy of God and man, and he only, had perpetrated this piece of malice. It may have seemed to be a learned doctor, or a clever poet, or a treacherous orator, who scattered doubt among the people, and introduced skeptics into the church; but the worker behind the scenes, the real author of the mischief, is always the devil himself.

The servants were eager to undo the mischief at once in the first way that suggested itself. Out with the false wheat, and let the true wheat grow! A thing more easy to propose than to do; but one which would naturally occur to all true

servants who were sorry for their neglect, and eager to set matters right. Had there been weeds in the corn, the hoe could have removed them; but this darnel grew on the wheat, and was like the wheat, and thus was the true picture of those in the church and in the world, who are nominal Christians, and fair moralists, but who know nothing of the life of God. We cannot get rid of these, and yet how often we wish we could!

29. *But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*

The darnel was so plentiful, had become so intermixed with the corn, and was so much like it, that it would not be possible to cut up the one without pulling up the other also. In fact, there was a false wheat which grew upon the true corn, and to part these would be perilous to the crop. Hasty disciplinarians have often cast out the best and retained the worst. Where evil is clear and open, we may not hesitate to deal with it; but where it is questionable, we had better hold our hand till we have fuller guidance.

30. *Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.*

Suffer the two seeds to remain together for a season, that they may be the more effectually separated later on. It is true the evil will hinder and hamper the good; but even this will be better than that you should cast out the good by mistake. A separation time will come, and that will be “in the time of harvest” when both will be fully developed. That will be a fit season, when the division can be made and no harm done thereby The reapers then employed will do the work correctly, efficiently, universally, and finally. For the false wheat there will be burning in bundles; for the true, ingathering into the Lord’s own storehouse. This will be a perfect separation, and we are bidden to wait for it. Our Lord’s “I will say to the reapers” may very well keep us from making any hasty speeches to the elders of the churches, or to the magistrates of the land, so as to excite them to hurried and ungenerous discipline. Thorns and thistles they can root up, but the darnel is another matter. Magistrates and churches may remove the openly wicked from their society; the outwardly good who are inwardly worthless they must leave; for the judging of hearts is beyond their sphere.

Our Lord declares that the doom of the false wheat, the bastard professors, is terrible. Bind them in bundles; put like with like, sinner with like sinner. To burn them. No words can be more suggestive of terrible destruction After this what a quiet, peaceful tone we hear in the words, “Gather the wheat into my barn.” All gathered, all recognized as the Lord’s own, all housed in his storehouse.

31, 32. *Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.*

Mustard seed is the least of all seeds in proportion to that which comes of it; but it has a peculiar life in it, and therefore it produces so great a growth. The man in the parable we know: his field is the church, or the heart; he takes the seed which, perhaps, others neglect because they think it so small; he sows the living seed in his own field, and watches over it. It grows and grows, till at length it becomes the greatest among herbs, and is like to a tree. The results of the divine life in the soul are by no means little; but great graces, great projects, and great deeds are produced by it. The work of grace in the church and in the individual, is so apparent, that persons who know as little about heavenly things as linnets and sparrows, come and find shelter beneath the holy and beneficent influences and institutions which are its outgrowth.

We could not have guessed that our Lord and his twelve apostles would produce the myriad churches of Christendom. We cannot even now tell whereto a humble effort to do good may grow. We know not to what our own inner life will come. It has an expanding power within it, and it will burst every bond, and grow to a thing which will cast shadow, yield fruit, and lend shelter. If the Lord has planted the incorruptible seed within, its destiny is a great one.

Good Master, hasten this blessed development. We have seen nearly enough of the mustard seed; now let us see the tree.

33. *Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

Many expositors argue that this relates to the power of evil in the church, or in the heart. On this interpretation we see why “a woman took” the leaven, and why she was so secret about it, that it is said she hid it. According to the rule which is observed in the use of this symbol, leaven must be taken as the type of evil; and if the rule must be applied in this case, the teaching is obvious and valuable. The leaven soon began its corrupting influence in the church, and it continues, in one form or other, working still.

But the connection does not lead us so to interpret. The parable begins with the same words as the other, “The kingdom of heaven is like”; and there is not a word to warn us that the theme is changed, and that our Lord is not now speaking of the kingdom itself, but of evil in the kingdom. Moreover, our Lord does not say, “shall be like”, but “is like”, referring, therefore, to something then in operation; and we really fail to see that the woman had then hidden the leaven, much less hidden it “in three measures of meal”, that is to say, in a large church. Is not leaven here used simply as another picture of an influence which appears feeble, but turns out to be active, conquering, and at length all-pervading? This, though hidden in obscurity, in the midst of nations comparable to “three measures of meal”, wrought with a mysterious rapidity, and will still continue to work in the whole mass of the world, and subdue the nations to itself. Let our friends take their choice of the two interpretations, and learn a good lesson from either or both. From evil leaven, the Lord preserve us; by holy influences may we all be wrought upon!

34, 35. *All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: that; it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.*

That prophet was David, or Asaph. The Psalm (78.) begins, “Give ear, O my people, to my law.” By whom could this be spoken but by God? and yet in the third verse this same person speaks of “our fathers”; and therefore he must be a man. Here, then, in this seventy-eighth psalm, is the sacred person who is both God and man, and to our Lord Jesus Christ the language is most fitly applied by the evangelist. Our Lord speaks hidden things, and sets forth secret things in an open parable, which is understood by those who have had the eyes of their

understanding opened, while those who are self-blinded perceive not his meaning. These parables contain ancient secrets and deep mysteries; and, may be, there is more of prophecy in them than we have yet perceived.

36. *Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field.*

Possibly, they had made out the mustard seed and the leaven, but the tares remained a puzzle to them. We are not sorry for this, since, through their ignorance, we obtain our Lord's own interpretation. We should certainly have missed our way without it.

37. *He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.*

He came to this world on purpose to sow the kingdom of heaven in it. All the grace, and truth, and spiritual life among us is of his sowing.

38. *The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one.*

The field is the world, including the church; but the field is not the church exclusively: for "the good seed", or "the children of the kingdom", is much the same as the church, and the evil seed are persons who mingle with the people of God, and live together with them in necessary association in the great field of the world. Church fellowship is not particularly aimed at, though it is encompassed by the terms used. Bigots have tried to extirpate heretics, and national churches have even forbidden unsound thinkers to remain in the country; but all attempts at securing any region from having infidels or heretics residing in it have soured into persecution. Nowhere on earth can we maintain a settlement of saints alone. In many cases, the cruel treatment of the very best of men has been produced by the notion that they were erroneous teachers, and therefore ought not to be tolerated. To contend earnestly against error by spiritual means is right and needful, but to use carnal weapons, and other remedies of force, is absolute folly and wickedness. This world is now a field of mingled growths, and so it must be

till the end come.

39. *The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world and the reapers are the angels.*

The devil is the sower of evil men. There were none such till he came into Paradise; but now they are everywhere, not only in the field of the world, but in the garden of the church. Now is the time of growing: the harvest hastens on, and the reapers are already chosen by the great householder. We may rejoice that angels, and not men, are the reapers. At what hour the consummation of the age (R. V.) shall come we do not know, but it is surely drawing nigh.

40-42. *As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

What a description! The outgathering of “all things that offend”, and of all persons who cause others to stumble, and who work evil, will be a consummation devoutly to be wished. Not only the outwardly wicked, but the false pretenders, the mock wheat, shall be removed. This will be the purging not of the church, but of the kingdom, which at that time will include the whole field of the world. We could not effect this clearance, but the Lord’s own angels can, and will. This shall be “in the end of this world”, the finis and climax of this dispensation. The fate of these ungodly ones will be fire, the most terrible of punishments; but this will not annihilate them; for they shall exhibit the surest tokens of a living woe “wailing and, gnashing of teeth.” Sooner or later, this is what must come of evil men. Though in this world they flourish in the same field with believers, and can hardly be discerned from them, they shall be removed from such honorable association, and be cast, with the rubbish of the universe, into that great “furnace of fire” whose smoke goeth up for ever and ever. This the Son of man will do with authority; the angels are simply the executioners of the wrath of the Lamb.

43. *Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of*

their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Relieved of the cloud created by compulsory association with mere pretenders, the righteous shall shine forth. The kingdom always was their Father's, and now shall they be seen to be his heirs, and, in consequence, inheritors of his glory and joy. Till then they must be, to a great extent, concealed by those who intrude their unworthy presence, and keep them in a measure of darkness through the world-mixture. The intruders being removed by the angel executioners, "the righteous" will gain a distinct manifestness of character, which will cause their excellence to be as clearly seen as the sun at noon-day. This is good hearing for them; and as they have "ear to hear", let them hear it with delighted attention.

44. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.*

Still the theme is "the kingdom of heaven." The man lighted upon hid treasure; perhaps while he was ploughing or digging. He was not looking for it, yet he found it. Is it not written, "I am found of them that sought me not"? To obtain a right to the treasure-trove, the finder must buy the field; and to do this he parts with "all that he hath." So do men act when they discover the riches of the gospel. So did Jesus himself, at the utmost cost, buy the world to gain his church, which was the treasure which he desired. The special application of the parable we leave to the reader. Practically he will do well to become the chief actor in a similar incident. Gladly may he part with all that he has to make sure of the kingdom of heaven.

45, 46. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*

Observe that in this instance the precious thing was not met with by accident, but discovered after an intelligent search for it. The first parable, is descriptive of the ordinary man, to whom the gospel comes when he is following his calling, and by no means earnest after spiritual things. He turns up a crock of gold while ploughing, and having enough sense to prefer gold to clods, he buys the field and

the treasure. In the present parable the actor is not a ploughman, but a merchant, dealing in precious things. This man is a superior person, aware of the value of jewels, and seeking them as the business of his life. He is a thoughtful, earnest individual, anxious after the best things; and therefore he reads, he hears, he considers and searches, even as a jeweler would do who is seeking goodly pearls. He discovers the gospel, and rightly judges "the kingdom of heaven" to be the pearl of pearls, and therefore sacrifices all things else that he may have it in his own possession. In both cases all was sold to win the prize; and so in any case, however our conversion takes place, we must give up all for Christ; not of compulsion, but willingly. It must be a pleasure to us to make sacrifices; indeed, we must consider them to be no sacrifices, just as those two men were eager and anxious to sell all their property to get possession of the one treasure which would make them rich for life.

47, 48. *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.*

Here, among men, the "kingdom of heaven" is as a seine or draw-net. It encompasses a great area of water, and entangles within it all kinds of creatures that move in the sea. The net-casting is a success, for the net gathers, and is full. Yet the success may not be so great as it seems; for the contents of the net are varied; it gathered of every kind. So long as it is in the water, it contains bad and good, of necessity. It cannot be otherwise; and it would be idle to set about sorting the things which it encompasses while yet in the sea. On the shore will be the place for separation: the worthless, useless, and corrupt will be castaways, even though they were once in the net; but the truly precious will be taken from the net and presented to their Lord. We must now stand and fish, casting the net, and waiting for a haul; not till the end shall we sit down and sort out our takings. Many are trying to do the last thing first.

49, 50. *So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

The separation between “the wicked” and “the just”, who are in the kingdom, will be at the close of the dispensation. It will be accomplished by the messengers of God, the appointed angels: it will be done infallibly, readily, fully, and finally. The doom of the wicked is described in terms which are terrible to the last degree. Those who would have us think lightly of the punishment of the ungodly have no countenance in the teachings of the Lord Jesus. Neither does the idea that fire causes annihilation find any support from the metaphor here employed; for in the furnace of fire “there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

51. *Jesus said unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, lord.*

This is a very important question. To understand truth is essential, to understand it all is desirable. The mere letter or parable, without a sense of the meaning, will neither quicken nor sanctify. As food must be eaten, digested, and assimilated, so must truth be taken up and taken in by the mind. Could we say, “Yea, Lord”, if he were to enquire of us? Do we even understand the seven parables which he has here given us? Did those who said “Yea, Lord”, comprehend the Master’s teaching as they might have done? Probably their view of their own understanding was not so lowly as it might have been.

52. *Then said he unto them, Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*

Our first desire should be that we ourselves may be “instructed unto the kingdom of heaven”: a remarkable phrase. This done, we are each one appointed to be like a householder, and are made responsible for using our knowledge as food for all in our house. What we understand we must teach. What we have received into our treasure we must bring forth. If the Lord has instructed us unto his kingdom, it is for the sake of others. Toward these we must act as one who keeps house, and brings out provisions for the family. Some things have been laid up to ripen, and these the steward fetches out in due season; others are the better for being fresh from the garden; and these he serves up at once. He keeps back nothing; but he does not confine his provision to one single thing. He is not weary of the old; he is not afraid of the new. Old truth is made new by a living experience:

new views of truth, if indeed it be truth, are only the old in a fresh light. We must in our instruction of others cultivate variety, but we must not aim at it by poisoning the children with deadly drugs for the sake of giving them novel dishes. Only things worth putting into a treasury are worth bringing forth to the household. That scribe had need be well instructed who has to keep on handing out a variety of precious truth throughout a long life.

Lord, make us sufficient for these things. Instruct as, that we may instruct our household. May we make no reserve for self, but bring out for thy people all that which thou hast put in our charge. Oh, to be accepted of thee in the day of thy return, because found faithful to our trust!

53. *And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence.*

He stayed not to overdo what had been so well done. When he had "finished" he left of. When he had completed his ministry in a place "he departed thence."

54. *And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?*

With what emotion did our Lord return to his native place! How ready he was to associate with former friends, for "he taught them in their synagogue." How eagerly they came together to hear their young countryman, who had made so great a stir! How amazed they were at the masterly way in which he touched great subjects, and wrought great deeds! Astonishment led to enquiry. They began to ask how it could be. The question, "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?" might have been brought forward reverently, and have led to their obtaining a most instructive reply; but some flavored their question with impertinent unbelief, and this cost them dear.

Lord, grant that my questions may never savor of incredulity. Give me to be astonished at what thou dost, and yet not to be astonished that THOU shouldst be able to do such mighty works.

55, 56. *Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?*

His pedigree seemed to them to be of them lowliest. He had sprung from among themselves: his reputed father was a village artisan; his mother was plain Mary, and his relations commonplace parties enough. This ought to have gratified and encouraged them; but it did not. They grew sarcastic, and harped upon the family names of James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas. They hinted that he could not have learned much wisdom in a carpenter's shop; and as he had not been among the rabbis to obtain a superior education, he could not really know much. How could he have attained to such eminence? He was a mere nobody. Why, they knew him when his parents lost him when they went up to the feast at Jerusalem! They could not listen to the talk of the carpenter's son.

57. *And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.*

They stumbled at that which should have been a stepping-stone for them. Poor souls! How like to many in these days, who must have glitter and pretense, or they think nothing of the profoundest wisdom! If they can understand a sermon, they conceive that it cannot be a good one; if a man acts simply and naturally, he cannot in their eyes be worthy of much notice. Still is it commonly the case that, where a man is known, his neighbors find it hard to think that he can be really great. Distance lends enchantment: a cloud increases the apparent size. This is folly.

58. *And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*

Unbelief bound his hands. Why should he spend his sacred energy among a people who would not be profited thereby? Where he would have chosen to do most, he was forced to do least, because he saw that all he did would be wasted on them. The Lord save us from such a state of mind!

Give us, O Lord, faith to the full; that for us, and in us, and by us, thou mayest be able to do many mighty works of grace!

Matthew 14

1. *At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus, and said unto his servants. This is John the Baptist; he is risen form the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.*

When the whole country was moved, “at that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus.” Then, but not till then, the fame of Jesus reached this wretched princelet, who was too absorbed in self and lust to hear much about spiritual matters. The peasant heard of Jesus before the prince. The Word of God may enter the palace, but it forces its way slowly. Herod spoke to his servants about this famous person, for he was so alarmed that he could not conceal his fears. A guilty conscience is haunted by a misdeed. “John” was written on the tyrant’s memory; and now that he is startled by a rumor of wonders being done, he cries out, “This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead.” Herod was a. Sadducee by profession, but his terror made his skeptical creed crumble to dust. For John at least he believes that there is a resurrection. Great superstition often underlies a surface of avowed unbelief. Herod Antipas had a quarter of his father’s kingdom, and less than a quarter of his ability; but in selfish cruelty he was a true cub of the old wolf. He had enough conscience to scare him, though not enough to change him. Note how he believed in the power of a risen man: “Therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.” If from mere hearsay Herod attributed such power to our Lord on earth, shall we not believe in the Almighty power of our risen Lord upon his throne in glory?

3, 4. *For Herod had laid hold on John, and bound him, and put him in prison for Herodias’ sake, his brother Philip’s wife. For John said unto him, It is not lawful for thee to have her.*

Of course it was not lawful for him to take to himself his brother Philip’s wife

while Philip was yet living, and while his own wife was living also. While he was the guest of Philip at home, he became ensnared by Herodias; and the guilty pair, who in addition to their being already wedded, were by birth too near of kin for lawful marriage, came back to Galilee as if they were man and wife. It was bravely spoken of the Baptist when he bluntly said, “It is not lawful for thee to have her”; but the sentence cost him dear. Herod Antipas could bear to do the deed, but he could not bear to be told that he had committed an unlawful act. John did not mince matters, or leave the question alone. What was a king to him if that king dared to trample on the law of God? He spoke out pointedly, and Herod knew that he did so. Herod laid, hold on John, because John’s word had laid hold on Herod.

The power of evil love comes out in the words, “for Herodias sake.” This fierce woman would brook no rebuke of her licentiousness. She was a very Jezebel in her pride and cruelty; and Herod was as a puppet in her hands.

5. *And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet.*

Neither he nor his paramour could bear such plain dealing, and so he would have silenced for ever the rebuking tongue if he had not been restrained by a salutary dread of the populace. Herod was already a murderer in intent; but fear stayed his cruel hand. The people held John in high esteem as a servant of God, and the tyrant dared not incur the wrath of the multitude. What slaves to fear bad princes may become. It is well they should be so; for thus a temporary check is put upon their tyranny. Alas! it is not often a restraint for long, for they soon break loose again; and for a favorite’s sake risk the anger of the nation.

6. *But when Herod’s birthday was kept, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod.*

There is no harm in keeping birthdays, but where is great harm in lewd dances, or in any other sports which suggest evil. Salome was a true “daughter of Herodias.” She forgot her rank, and danced before the court after the lascivious fashion of the ago, so as to gratify a probably drunken monarch. She “pleased Herod,” her mother’s paramour; and we can readily guess the kind of dancing which would please him.

In these days mothers too often encourage their daughters in dress which is scarcely decent, and introduce them to dances which are not commendable for purity. No good can come of this; it may please the Herods, but it displeases God. In this case dancing led to a cruel crime; and it is to be feared that in many instances gross immoralities have taken their rise in dances which suggested uncleanness.

7. *Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask,*

A foolish promise, and a wicked oath. Men of Herod's order are always free with oaths. Men should know what they are at when they promise, and never set their signature to a blank which another may fill up; for they may thus sign away their all. Besides, a mere piece of immodest posturing could never deserve so large a recompense. Herod was surely. as much fool as knave. Had wine and lust taken away his heart?

8. *And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger.*

The whole thing was planned between this shameless mother and daughter, who both knew Herod's weak points and how to handle him. The mother set her daughter dancing, and then put the request into her mouth: she was of her mother's nature, and readily carried out that wicked woman's instructions. No doubt Herodias was more incensed than Herod at what the Baptist had dared to say; for it is usually the case that the female offender is most angered by a rebuke of such sin. Sad that from noble Maccabean blood such a female monster should have sprung! She must have John Baptist's head upon a dish The mention of the details shows the cold-blooded character of the demand. As if it were a dainty dish for her tooth, the prophet's head must be served up in a charger.

9. *And the king was sorry: nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them, which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.*

Pretty sorrow! A crocodile is said to shed tears over those it snaps in two. "The King" was afraid of the consequences. Poor king! He may have felt a dying

struggle of conscience, for Herod had some sort of reverence for John; yet his grief could not have been very deep, for he had already willed to kill him. The king feared that his courtiers and comrades at the drinking bout would think him weak, and perhaps jeer at him for being too religious to touch a prophet. Such fear of being thought weak proved that he was weak indeed. In addition to this, Herodias would consider him to be by no means so fond of her as he had professed to be, and how could he endure her passionate grief? Moreover, he was “a man of honor”, and for the oath’s sake he must not run back. With the regret which a wolf feels because he must eat the lamb, he gave orders for the murder of John, and the handing of his head to the young girl. Rash promises, and even oaths, are no excuse for doing wrong. The promise was in itself null and void, because no man has a right to promise to do wrong. Wicked oaths ought to be repented of, and not acted out; but this cruel tyrant commanded the murder, and so went through with his horrible promise.

10. *And he sent, and beheaded John in the prison.*

Herod sent, and beheaded John. By word a precious life is ended. How lightly tyrants think of murder! No miracle was wrought for John’s deliverance. Why should there be? It was well for the Baptist to go to his reward, for his work was done. He was not left to pine in solitude: the man of God left his prison for Paradise by one sudden stroke of the sword. It was a foul murder, but to the Baptist it was a happy release. He was no longer in the power of Herod or Herodias: he received his crown in heaven though he had lost his head on earth.

Herod is said to have “beheaded John”; for what he ordered to be done is set to his account, and in his conscience he knew it. We do ourselves what we do by others. Men may sin by proxy, but they will be guilty in person.

11. *And his head was brought in a charger, and given to the damsel: and she brought it to her mother.*

What a present for a young lady! It was given to the damsel The girl is not ashamed to lift the dainty dish, and bear it to her fiendish mother, that she may glut her malice by the sight of the head of her faithful reprover. What a mother and daughter! Two bad women can do a world of mischief. What a fate for such a head! Did it even from the charger charge the foul adulteress with her crime?

12. *And his disciples came, and took up the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.*

The good man's followers did not desert their murdered leader: "his disciples came." The mangled corpse was surrendered to them; they reverently took up the body, and buried it. They were his disciples still, and his death was not the death of their faith. They did the only act of kindness then in their power to him whom they had followed. They regarded the headless trunk as being the last relic of John, and so they gathered about it, and gave it honorable burial. But it is not said by the Evangelist that they buried John, but "they took up his body, and buried it", not him. The real John no man could bury, and Herod soon found that, being dead, he yet spake.

What remained for John's disciples but to go to their leader's Friend and Master, and tell him all the circumstances, and wait further orders? John had taught them well, since they went at once to Jesus when their teacher was dead.

When we are in a great trouble, we shall be wise to do our best, and at the same time tell the Lord Jesus all about it, that he may direct us further as to what we are to do. What a relief to tell Jesus! It was a painful story for him to hear; but he would be sure to impart consolation to these mourners; and in our case also he will send comfort.

13. *When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities.*

Our Lord could not allow so sad an event as the death of his Forerunner to pass without special devotion; perhaps also he judged it wise to be out of the dominions of Herod just at this time. When such a tiger once tastes blood he is apt to thirst for more. Moreover, rest was needed both by himself and by the little band which attended him; and our Lord was no hard taskmaster, overdriving his servants. As soon therefore as Jesus heard of John's death, he went with his followers to a lone spot beyond Herod's jurisdiction; "a desert place apart." He went there by ship, to put the sea between him and the crowd. It was difficult for him to get into retirement, but he used common-sense ways of obtaining it. He knew the absolute need of privacy, and he strove after it. The

discreet use of solitude has yet to be learned by many workers.

The multitude would not permit him to be at rest: they were curious, anxious, necessitous; and so they were soon on foot after him. While he sailed by sea, they hurried along the shore. It is a happy sign when there is an eagerness to hear the Word of God. The Lord send us more of it in these days of religious indifference.

14. *And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.*

When he left the boat and went forth, our Lord found a congregation waiting for him. In the most emphatic sense he saw the people, and at the sight he was burdened. He was not angry at the great multitude, nor did he show disappointment at being balked in his pursuit of quiet; but he was moved with compassion. The original word is very expressive: his whole being was stirred to its lowest depth, and therefore he proceeded at once to work miracles of mercy among them. They came unasked, he received them tenderly, he blessed them graciously, and at length fed them bountifully. He was as a stag that fled from the huntsmen; but they had overtaken him, and he yielded himself to them. To those who needed him most he attended first: “He healed their sick”! Lord, heal thou me, for I am sick in soul, if not in body!

15. *And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals.*

The disciples had the compassion of men who see the need; but to their human thought there seemed but one poor way out of it, namely, in effect to shirk the difficulty by sending the multitudes away. The short way out of a perplexity is generally a very poor affair. To this day many Christians get no further than leaving the masses to themselves, or to some unknown influences which may turn up. One thing was wise in the disciples; they did bring the matter to Jesus: “When it was evening, his disciples came to him.” They represented the place as barren, the time as late, the people as many, their needs as great: they were well posted up in all discouraging matters. The proposed course of action was the one weak point in the representation. Our schemes are for the most part wretched

affairs. It is almost a wonder that we dare to state them. Do we forget that our Lord Jesus hears our sorry proposals?

Note the disciples' word: "The time is now past." We usually think the times are unpropitious for large attempts. As for the position, it is hopeless: "This is a desert place." What can be done here? As for the disciples' proposal, it was of a kind which is common enough: "Don't let the people die under our noses; pull down the rookery in the next street; clear out the bad houses from our district." "Send the multitude away." Or, better still, show the people the dignity of self-help! Talk to them about thrift and emigration. Urge them to go into the villages, and buy themselves victual. This is a favorite nostrum at this day with those who want to save their own loaves and fishes. Our Lord has nobler thoughts than theirs: he will display his royal bounty among the hunger, crowd.

16. *But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat.*

Glorious word! "They need not depart." We are able, when he is with us, to meet any cases of want which may arise; we never need send the multitude away to be dealt with by the State, by the parish, or by hirelings. If we will but set to work, we shall find that the Lord makes us competent for every emergency. "Give ye them to eat": you talk of their buying for themselves, but they are penniless, and cannot buy. Everything must be free, or they will starve; you are the men to feed them freely; get at it. Begin at once.

17. *And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes.*

See how they overhaul their provisions; and they report, "We have here but five loaves." With what a gloomy "but" they show how lean is the larder! Those two sardines make the stock seem positively ridiculous. It is a good thing for us to know how very poor we are, and how far from being able to meet the wants of the people around us. It is for our good to be made to confess this in so many words to our Lord.

Truly, he who writes this comment has often felt as if he had neither loaf nor fish; and yet for some forty years and more he has been a full-handed waiter at

the King’s great banquets.

18. *He said, Bring them hither to me.*

He will have us yield up what we have: we are to make no reserve. We must hand all over to Jesus: “Bring them hither to me.” He will accept what we bring: this is implied in the command to bring it. He will make a little go a long way: that which gets to Jesus will reach the needy by the surest route. The shortest way to procure provender for perishing souls is to go to Jesus about them.

19. *And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.*

He had prepared both carpet and seats for his guests, by making grass to grow in his open-air banquet-hall. At the bidding of their great Host, all the crowds sat down. “He commanded,” and they obeyed: a proof of the singular power of the personality of our Lord to produce obedience even in simple matters. One would have thought that they might have answered — “What is the use of sitting down? How shall a table be furnished in this wilderness?” But our Lord’s presence awed unbelief into silence and obedience. The King of men is immediately obeyed when he commands in the fullness of his majesty. “Where the word of a king is, there is power.”

Now that all is in order, the divine Lord takes the slender provision into his blessed hands. By a simple sign he teaches the people whence to expect gracious supplies: “Looking up to hearer.” Not without a blessing does the al fresco meal begin: “He blessed.” God’s blessing must be sought even when Jesus is there: He will not act without the Father. Our Lord Jesus did all in the provision of the feast: he blessed, he brake, he gave to his disciples. All is with him. The disciples come in to take their subordinate position, after he has displayed his divine creatorship. They are the waiters: they serve and distribute; they can do no more; they are glad to do that. In haste, but yet in order, they divide the food among the throng, much wondering and adoring as they so do. It was bread and a relish with it; good fare and agreeable; sufficient, but not luxurious. Some would give the poor only the barest necessaries; bread only; our Lord adds fish.

What a feast was this! Christ for Master of the feast: apostles for butlers; thousands for numbers; and miracles for supplies! What a far more glorious feast is that which the gospel spreads for hungry souls! What a privilege to be fed by the Son of God!

20. *And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full.*

No one was neglected, no one refused, no one was too faint, no one left off till he was satisfied, no one needed anything else, no one found that the food did not suit him; for indeed they were all hungry, "and they did all eat." No one stinted himself, or was stinted, all "were filled." Ours is a filling Benefactor, and he provides filling food.

After the feast, twelve great baskets wore needed to hold the fragments. It was impossible to exhaust the store. The baskets were full as well as the people. There was more provision after the feeding than before it. By feeding others our stock increases. That which was left had been blessed as well as that which was eaten, and therefore it was fine food for the disciples. They gave plain bread and fish, and they receive more in quantity, and a blessing to improve the quality. Those who wait upon others at Christ's bidding shall have a fair portion for themselves. Those who fill others' mouths shall have their own baskets filled. Everybody is satisfied when Jesus makes the feast.

21. *And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children.*

"Women and children" are usually more numerous at a sermon than men; but as the people had come on foot, perhaps the stronger sex preponderated on this occasion, as they generally do at feeding-times. From many a great banquet women and children are shut out; but in Christ Jesus there is no exclusion because of sex or youth.

Five thousand men is no small dinner-party. Think of five thousand fed with live loaves! A loaf among a thousand! Never let us fear that our consecrated stores will not hold out, or that we have not talent or ability enough if the Lord is pleased to use us. Our King will yet feed all the nations on that gospel which is

today so little thought of. Amen! So let it be.

22. *And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*

Straightway is a business word: Jesus loses no time. No sooner is the banquet over than he sends off the guests to their homes. While they are well fed he bids them make the best of their way home. He who made the multitude sit down was able also to send the multitude away; but they needed sending, for they were loth to go.

The sea must be crossed again, or Jesus cannot find seclusion. How he must run the gauntlet -to get a little rest! Before he starts again across the sea, he performs another act of self-denial; for he cannot leave till he sees the crowd happily dispersed. He attends to that business himself, giving the disciples the opportunity to depart in peace. As the captain is the last to leave the ship, so is the Lord the last to leave the scene of labor. The disciples would have chosen to stay in his company, and to enjoy the thanks of the people; but he constrained them to get into a ship. He could not get anyone to go away from him at this time without sending and constraining This loadstone has great attractions. He evidently promised his disciples that he would follow them; for the words are, “to go before him unto the other side.” How he was to follow he did not say, but he could always find a way of keeping his appointments. How considerate of him to wait amid the throng while the disciples sailed away in peace. He always takes the heavy end of the load himself.

23. *And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

Now that the crowd is gone, he can take his rest, and he finds it in prayer. He went up into a mountain apart in a place where he might speak aloud, and not be overheard or disturbed, he communed with the Father alone. This was his refreshment and his delight. He continued therein till the thickest shades of night had gathered, and the day was gone. “Alone”, yet not alone, he drank in new strength as he communed with his Father. He must have revealed this private

matter to the recording evangelist, and surely it was with the intent that we should learn from his example.

We cannot afford to be always in company, since even our blessed Lord felt that he must be alone.

24. *But the ship now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.*

While Jesus was alone, they, in the ship, were in the same condition, but not occupied with the same spiritual exercise. When they first quitted the shore it was fair sailing in the cool of the evening; but a storm gathered hastily as night covered the sky. On the lake of Galilee the wind rushes down from the gullies between the mountains, and causes grievous peril to little boats; sometimes fairly lifting them out of the water, and anon submerging them beneath the waves. That deep lake was peculiarly dangerous for small craft. They were far from land, for they were "in the midst of the sea", equally distant from either shore. The sea was furious, and their ship was "tossed with waves." The hurricane was terrible. "The wind was contrary", and would not let them go to any place which they sought. It was a whirlwind, and they were whirled about by it, but could not use it for reaching either shore. How much did their case resemble ours when we are in sore distress! We are tossed about, and can do nothing; the blast is too furious for us to bear up against it, or even to live while driven before it.

One happy fact remains: Jesus is pleading on the shore though we are struggling on the sea. It is also comfortable to know that we are where he constrained us to go (See verse 22), and he has promised to come to us in due time, and therefore all must be safe, though the tempest rages terribly.

25. *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*

Jesus is sure to come. The night wears on and the darkness thickens; the fourth watch of the night draws near, but where is he? Faith says, "He must come." Though he should stay away till almost break of day, he must come. Unbelief asks, "How can he come?" Ah, he will answer for himself: he can make his own way. "Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea." He comes in the teeth of the

wind, and on the face of the wave. Never fear that he will fail to reach the storm-tossed barque: his love will find out the way. Whether it be to a single disciple, or to the church as a whole, Jesus will appear in his own chosen hour, and his time is sure to be the most timely.

26. *And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.*

Yes, the disciples saw him; saw Jesus their Lord, and derived no comfort from the sight. Poor human nature's sight is a blind thing compared with the vision of a spiritual faith. They saw, but knew not what they saw. What could it be but a phantom? How could a real man walk on those foaming billows? How could he stand in the teeth of such a hurricane? They were already at their wits' end, and the apparition put an end to their courage. We seem to hear their shriek of alarm: "they cried out for fear." We read not that "they were troubled" before: they were old sailors, and had no dread of natural forces; but a spirit — ah, that was too much of a terror. They were at their worst now; and yet, if they had known it, they were on the verge of their best. It is noteworthy that the nearer Jesus was the greater was their fear. Want of discernment blinds the soul to its richest consolations. Lord, be near, and let me know thee! Let me not have to say with Jacob, "Surely God was in this place; and I knew it not!"

27. *But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not of afraid.*

He did not keep them in suspense: "Straightway Jesus spake unto them." How sweetly sounded that loving and majestic voice! Above the roar of waves and howling of winds, they heard the voice of the Lord. This was his old word also, "Be of good cheer." The most conclusive reason for courage was his own presence. "It is I; be not afraid." If Jesus be near, if the spirit of the storm be, after all, the Lord of love, all room for fear is gone. Can Jesus come to us through the storm? Then we shall weather it, and come to him. He who rules the tempest is not the devil, not chance, not a malicious enemy; but Jesus. This should end all fear.

28. *And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come*

unto thee on the water.

Peter must be the first to speak; he is impulsive; and besides, he was a sort of foreman in the company. The first speaker is not always the wisest man. Peter's fears have gone, all but one "if"; but that "if" was working him no good, for it seemed to challenge his Master: "Lord, if it be thou." What a test to suggest: "Bid me come unto thee on the water"! What did Peter want with walking the waters? His name might have suggested that like a stone he would go to the bottom. It was an imprudent request: it was the swing of the pendulum in Peter from despair to an injudicious venturing. Surely, he wist not what he said. Yet we, too, have put our Lord to tests almost as improper. Have we not said, "If thou hast ever blessed me, give me this and that"? We, too, have had our water-walking, and have ventured where nothing but special grace could uphold us. Lord, what is man?

29. *And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.*

When good men are unwise and presumptuous, it may be for their lasting good to learn their folly by experience. "He said, Come." Peter's Lord is about to teach him a practical lesson. He asked to be bidden to come. He may come. He does come. He leaves the boat, he treads the wave. He is on the way towards his Lord. We can do anything if we have divine authorization, and courage enough to take the Lord at his word. Now there were two on the sea, Two wonders! Which was the greater? The render may not find it easy to reply. Let him consider.

30. *But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.*

"But": a sorrowful "but" for poor Peter. His eye was off his Lord and on the raging of the wind: "he saw the wind boisterous." His heart failed him, and then his foot failed him. Down he began to go — an awful moment is this "beginning to sink"; yet it was only a "beginning", he had time to cry to his Lord, who was not sinking. Peter cried, and was safe. His prayer was as full as it was short. He had brought his eye and his faith back to Jesus, for he cried, "Lord." He had

come into this danger through obedience, and therefore he had an appeal in the word “Lord.” Whether in danger or not, Jesus was still his Lord. He is a lost man, and he feels it, unless his Lord will save him — save him altogether, save him now. Blessed prayer: “Lord save me.” Reader, does it not suit you? Peter was nearer his Lord when he was sinning than when he was walking. In our low estate we are often nearer to Jesus than in our more glorious seasons.

31. *And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

Our Lord delays not when our peril is imminent and our cry is urgent: “Immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand.” He first “caught him” and then taught him. Jesus saves first, and upbraids afterwards, when he must needs do so. When we are saved is the fit time for us to chasten ourselves for our unbelief. Let us learn from our Lord, that we may not reprove others till we have first helped them out of their difficulties.

Our doubts are unreasonable: “Wherefore didst thou doubt?” If there be reason for little faith, there is evidently reason for great confidence. If it be right to trust Jesus at all, why not trust him altogether? Trust was Peter’s strength; doubt was his danger. It looked like great faith when Peter walked the water; but a little wind soon proved it to be “little faith.” Till our faith is tried, we can form no reliable estimate of it.

After his Lord had taken him by the hand, Peter sank no further, but resumed the walk of faith. How easy to have faith when we are close to Jesus!

Lord, when our faith fails, come you to us, and we shall walk on the wave.

32. *And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.*

So that Peter’s walk and his rescue had happened in the face of the tempest. He could walk the water well enough when his Lord held his hand, and so can we. What a sight! Jesus and Peter, hand in hand, walking upon the sea! The two made for the ship at once: miracles are never spun out to undue length. Was not Peter glad to leave the tumultuous element, and at the same time to perceive that the gale was over? “When they were come into the ship, the wind ceased”; it is

well to be safe in a storm, but more pleasant to find the calm return and the hurricane end. How gladly did the disciples welcome their Lord, and their brother, Peter, who though wet to the skin, was a wiser man for his adventure!

33. *Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.*

No wonder that Peter "worshipped him", nor that his comrades did the same. The whole of the disciples, who had been thus rescued by their Lord's coming to them on the stormy sea, were overwhelmingly convinced of his Godhead. Now they were doubly sure of it by unquestionable evidence, and in lowly reverence they expressed to him their adoring faith, saying, "Of a truth thou art the Son of God."

34-36. *And when they were gone over they came into the land of Gennesaret. And when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole.*

The barque so lately tempest tossed is soon at the desired haven; and now other scenes of wonder meet our eyes. Land where he may, the great Physician is sure to find patients. Some of the men of that place had knowledge of him; and these were as sparks to set the rest of the people on fire by wonderful accounts of what Jesus had done. Many became eager advertisers of his skill, and either went themselves, or "sent out" others "into all that country round about." Very busy those people were. They sent out; they brought unto him; they besought him; they touched his garment; they were made perfectly whole. The sentences follow each other without a break. The people asked little, they begged "that they might only touch the hem of his garment;" but they received much; for they "were made perfectly whole." In no case was there any failure: in every instance the work was complete. Their humble request was founded upon a precedent, was urged by earnest spirits, and was accompanied with practical sympathy, therefore it was not refused. How glad that whole region was made! "All that were diseased" had become happy witnesses of the Lord's healing power.

Our King is master both on land and water. Whether it is on the sea of Gennesaret, or in “the land of Gennesaret” his supreme power and majesty are infallibly proven. He stills tempests, and allays fevers. He touches waves with his foot, and they grow firm; he touches sick bodies with his hand, and they return to health. He imparts to his servant Peter, and to the hem of his own garment. marvelous power.

Matthew 15

1. *Then came to, Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hand, when they eat bread.*

When our Lord was busiest his enemies assailed him. These ecclesiastics “of Jerusalem” were probably the cream of the set, and from their great reputation they reckoned upon an easy victory over the rustic preacher. Perhaps they were a deputation from headquarters, sent to confound the new Teacher. They had a question to raise, which to them may have seemed important; or possibly they pretended to think it so to answer their own purposes. Traditions of the elders were great things with them: to transgress these must be a crime indeed. Washing of the hands is a thing proper enough; one could wish it were oftener practiced; but to exalt it into a religious rite is a folly and a sin. These “scribes and Pharisee” washed their hands, whether they needed washing or not, out of a supposed zeal to be rid of any particle that might render them ceremonially unclean. Our Lord’s disciples had so far entered into Christian liberty that they did not observe the rabbinical tradition: “they wash not their hands when they eat bread.” Why should they wash if their hands were clean? Tradition had no power over their consciences. No man has any more right to institute a new duty than to neglect an old one. The issuing of commands is for the King alone. Yet these religionists enquire why the Lord’s disciples break a law which was no law. It will be well if our opponents are unable to bring against us any worse charge than this.

3. *But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?*

“He answered” their question by asking them another. This was a very usual way with our Lord, and we may often imitate him in discussions with captious

persons. Our Lord turns a blaze of light upon them by the question — Why do ye transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? What is a “tradition” when compared with a “commandment”? What is a tradition when it is in conflict with a commandment? What are elders in comparison with GOD? Our Lord knew best how to handle these messengers of the evil powers. His question carried the war into their own territory, and turned their boastful assault into utter rout.

4-6. *For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; and honor not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by tradition.*

Our Lord explains his question, and lays home his accusation. God had bound the son and daughter to honor the parent; and this unquestionably included rendering to father and mother such help as they might need. From this duty there could be no escape without breaking the plain command of God. It was always right, by the law of nature, to be grateful to parents; and by the law of Moses it was always a deadly sin to revile them. In Exodus 21:17 we read: “He that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death.” Father and mother are to be had in reverence, and cherished with love; and the precept which ordains this, is called “the first commandment with promise.” There could be no mistake as to the meaning of the divine law, yet the base teachers of the period had invented a method of excusing men from the performance of so obvious a duty.

These wretched tradition - lovers taught that if a man cried, “Corban! A gift”; and thus nominally set apart for God what his parents sought of him, he must not afterwards give it to them. If in anger, or even in pretense, he placed what was requested by father or mother under a ban he became free from the obligation to aid his parents. It is true he was not required by the Rabbis to carry out his vow, and actually give the money or the goods to God; but as he had compromised the sacred name, he must on no account hand over the gift to his parents. So that a hasty word would loose any child from his duty to aid his father or his mother; and then he might pretend that he I was very sorry for having said it, but that his

conscience would not permit him to break the ban. Vile hypocrites! Advocates of the devil! Was ever device more shallow? Yet thus they “made the commandment of God of one effort.”

7, 8. *Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.*

Right well did they deserve the name which the indignant Savior fixed upon them: “Ye hypocrites.” They were agitated about hands unwashed, and yet laid their foul hands upon God’s most holy law. The prophetic words of Isaiah were indeed descriptive of them: he had pictured them to the life. Theirs was mouth-religion, lip-homage, and that only. Their heart never approached the Lord at all.

Thus, our Lord gave his opponents Scripture instead of tradition: he broke their wooden weapons with the sword of the Spirit. Holy Scripture must be our weapon against the Church of traditions: nothing will overthrow Rome but the Word of the Lord.

When quoting from the prophecy of Isaiah, our blessed Lord not only used a translation, but he gave the sense freely; thus rebuking the mere word-chopping of the Rabbis. They could count the letters of a sacred book, and yet utterly miss its meaning: he gave the soul and spirit of the inspired utterance. Jesus insisted upon heart-worship, and said nothing as to the matter of washing or not washing the hands before eating bread. That was too paltry a point for him to dwell upon.

9. *But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*

Religion based on human authority is worthless; we must worship the true God in the way of his own appointing, or we do not worship him at all. Doctrines and ordinances are only to be accepted when the divine Word supports them, and they are to be accepted for that reason only. The most punctilious form of devotion is vain worship, if it is regulated by man’s ordinance apart from the Lord’s own command.

10. *And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand.*

He turns to the common throng, among whom he had wrought his miracles of love. He called the multitude and bade them “hear, and understand.” It looks as if he would say by his actions that he would rather teach the ignorant peasants than those false-hearted scribes and Pharisees. He had more hope of being understood by the ignorant multitude than by educated men who had so wretchedly enslaved their judgments by following worthless traditions. The appeal of the gospel is from the doctors to the people. These last have more common sense and honesty than the former; yet even these need the exhortation, “Hear, and understand.”

11. *Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.*

Here is something for the crowd to think over, and for the Pharisees to chew upon. It would be a riddle to many, and a surprise to all. Preeminently it would be a staggering statement for formalists. Religionists of the day placed the chief point of morals in meats and drinks, but the Lord Jesus declared that it lay in thoughts and acts. The Pharisees had now a string to harp upon, since harp they would: this saying would afford a text for malicious comment for many a day. They had sought to lay hold upon a sentence which they could use as an accusation, and in this case he gave them one which they might quote with that design if they dared to do so. It was diametrically opposed to their teaching, and yet it was not easy to meet its keen edge, or withstand its singular force.

12. *Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying.*

The disciples evidently thought more of offending the Pharisees than their Master did. He knew that they would be offended, and thought it no calamity that they should be. He placed his remarkable aphorism in their way, that they might find themselves balked and gravelled by it. They had come to him in a fawning manner, desiring to catch him in his speech: he was disgusted with their hypocrisy, and by this staggering statement he unmasked them, and they came

out in their true colors. They could not further conceal their hate: henceforth they could not entrap the disciples by their professions of friendliness.

13. *But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.*

If men are themselves an offense, they deserve to be offended. If these professed teachers of God's mind cavil at God's Son, they deserve no quarter; but it is right and wise to treat them to truth which shall annoy them. A good gardener is careful to uproot weeds as well as to water plants. Our Lord's sententious utterance operated like a hoe to uproot these men from their religious profession; and he meant that it should do so. But what a solemn word is this! If our religion is not wholly of God it will come to an end, and that end will be destruction. No matter how fair the flower, if the Father hath not planted it, its doom is sealed: it shall not be pruned, but "rooted up." Those whom the truth uproots are uprooted indeed.

14. *Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*

He turned from them as unworthy of further notice, saying, "Let them alone." There was no need for the disciples to combat the Pharisees, they would be uprooted in the natural order of things by the inevitable consequences of their own course. Both themselves and their dupes would "fall into the ditch" of error and absurdity; and ultimately come to utter destruction. In every case it is so: when the bigoted teacher leads the ignorant disciple, they must both go wrong. The same is the case with every form of spiritual blindness in those who lead the thought of a period, and in those who follow their erroneous guidance. The philosophic unbelief of this age is blind with self-conceit, and fearful is the ditch towards which it is hastening. Alas! its teachers are carrying precious souls with them into the ditch of Atheism and anarchy.

O Lord, suffer us not to be despairing as to the present ascendancy of false doctrine. In patience may we possess our souls! We cannot make either the blind leaders or their blind followers see the ditch before them; but it is there all the same, and their fall is certain. Thou alone canst open the eyes of the blind, and we trust that this miracle of grace will be wrought by thee.

15. *Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable.*

The saying, which Peter calls a parable, was spoken to the multitude, and then were bidden to understand it; but assuredly they did not comprehend it, for even the College of Apostles failed to grapple with it. Peter, as spokesman, did well to go at once to the fountain-head and humbly say, “Declare unto us this parable.” He that uttered the dark saying could best interpret it.

16. *And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding?*

Of course the Pharisees would hate the light, and so refuse to see the spiritual truth which our Lord had set before them in so forcible a fashion. Nor was it wonderful that the crowd should be too ignorant to see the divine meaning of the compact sentence. But should not the chosen twelve have had clearer insight? After all their Lord’s teaching, were they “yet without understanding” Should they not have reached the inner sense of their Lord’s utterance? Alas, how often have we been in a like state! How pertinently might the question be put to us, “Are ye also yet without understanding?”

17. *Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?*

After years of the Master’s teaching, are we still unable to grasp an elementary truth? Can we not discern between physical and spiritual defilement? Food does not touch the soul: it passes through the body, but it does not enter the affections, or the understanding, And therefore does not defile a man. That which is eaten is material substance, and does not come into contact with the moral sense. This is clear enough to any unprejudiced mind. Meat passes through every passage of the bodily frame, from its entrance at the mouth, its passage through the bowels, to its ultimate expulsion; but it bears no relation to the mental and spiritual part of our being; and it is there only that real defilement can be caused.

18. *But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man.*

The outcomings of the mind have sprung from the soul of the man, and have a moral character about them: “things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart.” Words, and the thoughts which wear words as their garments, and the acts which are the embodiment of words; these are of the man himself, and these defile him. If the mind or heart had nothing to do with an act, it would no more pollute a man than the food which he swallows and ejects. Because acts and words come not from the mouth only, but from the soul, they are of far more importance than meats and drinks. Of course, defilement comes to a man when he is guilty of gluttony and drunkenness; yet this is not because of the mere meat or drink, but because the taking of them to excess is the exercise of unbridled appetite, and this also grows by that which gratifies it.

19. *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.*

What a list! What must that heart be out of which so many evils pour forth! These are the bees: what must the hive be! “Evil thoughts”, or reasonings, such as these Pharisees had been guilty of. “Modern thought” is a specimen of these evils; it comes from the heart rather than from the head. “Murders” begin not with the dagger, but with the malice of the soul. “Adulteries and fornications” are first gloated over in the heart before they are enacted by the body. The heart is the cage from whence these unclean birds fly forth. “Thefts” also are born in the heart: a man would not wrongfully take with the hand if he had not wrongfully desired with the heart. “false witness”, or lying and slander: this, too, first ferments in the heart, and then its venom is spit out in the conversation. He that utters “blasphemies” against his Maker shows a very black heart: how could he fall into such a needless, useless vice, unless his inmost soul had been steeped in rebellion against the Lord? These dreadful evils all flow from one fountain, from the very nature and life of fallen man.

20. *These are the thing. which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.*

They not only come from a defiled nature, but they still further defile the man. Thus had the Savior proved his aphorism. The things from within evidently, are of a most defiling character, and make a man unfit for communion with God, and for the performance of holy duties; but the neglect of having water poured on the

hands cannot be in the least comparable thereto. Yet those who had no repentance of polluting sins were struck with horror at a man's eating a piece of bread with unwashen hands.

21. *Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon.*

He left the loathsome company o the Pharisees, and went thence, going as far away as he could without quitting his own country. The great Bishop went to the very borders of his diocese. An inward attraction drew him where he knew that a believing heart was yearning for him. He was sent to the house of Israel as a preacher; but he interpreted his commission in it largest sense, and went "into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon." When those at the center prove incorrigible, the Lord goes to those who can be only reached from the circumference. Let us always plough to the very end of the field, and serve our day and generation to the extreme limits of our sphere.

22. *And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.*

"Behold": here is something worth beholding; good for eyes and hearts. Just as Jesus went to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, a woman came out of the same coasts to meet him. Sooner or later, a meeting will come about between Christ and seeking souls. This "woman of Canaan" had no claim on account of her nationality: she was a Gentile of the worst sort, of a race long before condemned to die. She came from the narrow strip of land whereon the Tyrians dwelt; and like Hiram, of Tyre, she knew the name of David; but she went further, for she had faith in David's Son. Love to her daughter led her to travel, to cry, to beseech, to implore mercy. What will not a mother's love achieve? Her need had abolished the barrier between Gentile and Jew; she appealed to Jesus as though she were of the same country as his disciples. She asked the healing of her child as a mercy to herself: "Have mercy on me." She asked it of Jesus as Lord. She asked it of One greater than Solomon, the son of David, the wisest and most potent of wonderworkers. She put the case briefly and pathetically, and pleaded for her daughter with all a mother's loving anxiety.

Her need taught her how to pray. Until we, also, know what we require, and are full of hopeful longings, we shall never plead prevailingly. Do we pray for our children as this woman pleaded for her daughter? Have we not good reason to take her for our example?

23. *But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.*

Silence was a hard answer; for it is translatable by fear into something worse than the harshest speech. “Not a word”, not a word from him whose every word is power! This was a heavy discouragement. Yet she was not silenced by the Lord’s silence. She increased her entreaties. The disciples were mistaken when they said, “She crieth after us.” No, no, she cried after him. Should this have afflicted them? Oh, that all men would cry after him! Such a blessed annoyance should be longed after by compassionate hearts among the Lord’s servants. The disciples were, however, drive to appeal to their Master, and though that was something, it was not much. Possibly they meant their complaint to help the women by obtaining an answer for her one way or another; but their words have a cold look — “Send her away.” May we never be so selfish as to feel troubled by enquirers! May we never send them away ourselves by cold looks and harsh words!

Still the disciples were not able to neglect her; they were forced to plead with Jesus about her; they came and besought him. If Christian people are apparently unsympathetic let us warm them into feeling by our persistent fervency.

24. *But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

When Jesus did speak, it was not to her, but to his disciples. She heard the word, and felt it to be a side blow which struck heavily at her hopes. She was not of “the house of Israel”; she owned that she could not number herself among the sheep; he was not sent to her; how could he go beyond his mission? It would have been small wonder if she had retired in despair. On the contrary, she redoubled her pleading.

25. *Then came she and worshipped him, saying, lord, help me.*

Instead of retiring she came nearer, and she “worshipped him.” It was well done. She could not solve the problems of the destiny of her race, and of the Lord’s commission; but she could pray. She knew little about the limitations of Messiahship, but she knew that the Lord had boundless power. If, as a shepherd, he may not gather her, yet, as Lord, he may help her. The divine nature of Christ is a well-spring of comfort to troubled hearts.

Her petition was brief, yet comprehensive; it came hot from her heart, and went straight to the point. Her daughter’s case was her own, and so she cried, “Lord, help me.” Lord, help us to pray as she did.

26. *But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.*

At length he turns, and gives a reply to her pleading; but it is not a cheering one. How hard its language! How unlike our Lord’s usual self! And yet how true! How unanswerable! Truly “it is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs.”

Of course privileges must not be given to those who have no right to them, nor must reserved boons be wasted upon the unworthy. The blessing sought is as bread for children, and the Canaanites were no more members of the chosen family than so many dogs. Their heathen character made them like dogs as to uncleanness. For generations they had known no more of the true God than the dogs which roam the streets. Often they and other Philistine tribes had snapped as dogs at the heels of the Lord’s people. The woman had probably heard such phrases as this from proud Jewish bigots, but she had not expected it from the Lord.

27. *And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.*

It was humbly spoken: “Truth, Lord.” It was bravely spoken; for she found food for faith in the hard crusts of our Lord’s language. Our Lord had used a word which should be rendered “little dogs”, and she caught at it. Little dogs become

the playmates of the children; they lie under the table, and pick up the fragments which fall to the ground from the table of their little masters. The householder so far takes the little dog under his care as to allow him to be under the table. If, Gentile dog as she is, she may not be shepherded as one of the flock, she will be content to be tolerated as one of the household in the character of a little dog; for then she will be allowed the crumbs which fall from the children's bread, from the dog's little masters' table. Great as was the blessing which she sought, it was but a crumb to the Lord's bounty, and to Israel's portion, and therefore she begged to have it, dog as she owned herself to be.

Let us accept the worst character that the Scripture gives us, and still find in it an argument for hope.

28. *Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

Our Savior loves great faith, and grants to it whatever it desires. Her faith was great comparatively: for a heathen woman, and for one who knew so little of the Savior, she was surpassingly strong in faith. But her faith was not only great comparatively it was great positively: to believe in a silent Christ, in one who treats her with a rebuff, in one who calls her a dog, is exceedingly great faith, measure it how you will. Few of us have a tithe as much faith in our Lord as this woman had. To believe that he can cure her daughter at once, and to cling to him for that boon, is faith which sets even the Lord a wondering, and he cries, "O woman, great is thy faith!" How splendid the reward: "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt"! According to her will her daughter's cure was immediate, perfect, and enduring. Oh, for like precious faith, especially for such faith in reference to our sons and daughters! Why should we not have it? Jesus is the same, and we have even more reasons for trusting in him than the Canaanitess could have had. Lord we believe; help thou our unbelief, and make our children whole.

29. *And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee; and went up into a mountain, and sat down there.*

He was always on the move: he "went about doing good." He had gone to the border of the land: he was soon back again to headquarters. He wastes not a

moment. He does not stay to be congratulated upon his success, but hastens to other work; and so we often read, “And Jesus departed from thence.”

How he loved the mountains and the sea! By the lake of Galilee he again chooses out a rising knoll, selects a standing place with ground around it for an assembly, and opens another session of his ministry of mercy. He sat down there, for he had set his heart upon blessing the people on that convenient spot. In imagination we see him taking his seat, and then speaking ex cathedra, from the rising ground, “nigh unto the sea of Galilee.” The mountain’s side was free to all, and none could complain of trespass, and it was far enough from busy towns to escape the noise of necessary labor. See how the people crowd! Our Lord’s presence will not long be unnoticed, though no sound of church-going bell gave notice of a service. As a preacher he never lacked a congregation. Where he sat down the people came: if he “went up into a mountain” they climbed after him. If we preach Jesus in the most out-of-the-way village, in a region almost inaccessible, we shall not be left without hearers.

30, 31. *And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus’ feet; and he healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.*

Still the same story. The magnet always attracts. The crowd in increased in volume. “Great multitudes came unto him.” They seem to spring up from the earth, and swarm from the sea: they are so soon about our Lord that there is no interval wherein he might rest. The sickness which they bring before him is still more varied than in former times. What a list of patients! What a gathering of miseries to one spot! The expectation of the people remains at flood-tide; they have the sick with them, and they “cast them down at Jesus’ feet”: leaving them with him in full confidence. The healing power continues to flow in full force: that one sentence is a grand summary of his marvelous cures: “He healed them.” This time the result is a greater degree of wonder among the crowd, attended by a gracious savor of praise to Israel’s God: “They glorified the God of Israel.” It was evident to them that Jehovah had remembered and visited his people, and was healing their sicknesses, and so for the moment they gave him glory. What

must it have been to be an eyewitness of such a scene of healing and of worship! What an education for the apostles! What stay for their faith in trying days after their Master was taken from them!

Lord, when we experience a revival of true religion, we behold the greatness of thy healing power in the spiritual world, and we, therefore, glorify the God of Israel — the God of the covenant, the God of wrestling prayer, the God of all grace.

32. *Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting lest they faint in the way.*

History repeats itself. We shall be wise to note the variations. What Jesus has done once he can and will do again and again, should need arise. In fact, one mercy is the promise of another. Our Lord is here the first to speak upon the way of dealing with the vast famishing crowd: the disciples do not come to him about the business, but he begins the conversation. In every case his heart is first, and in this case his speech is so. “Then Jesus called his disciples unto him.” They, are to be co-workers, and so he consults them, making them members of his privy-council. He has all tenderness, and can truly say, “I have compassion on the multitude.” Whether he moves in a matter of distress or not, his heart is always compassionate, and he thinks of the people’s present fasting, and possible fainting. His compassion is the spring which sets his power in motion. The crowds had continued following him, and he could not but pity the need which arose out of their perseverance in listening to his teaching. These people had endured a three days’ fast, or at least scantiness of food, to hear him preach. What preaching it must have been! But the great Teacher cares for their bodies as wolf as for their souls. and will not feel content to feed their minds only. From the usual point of view their lack of provision was their own concern: they had gathered of their own accord, and they could not reasonably look to him to give them both board and instruction for nothing; but his great heart could not consent to let them faint: he would not even innocently be the cause of injury to one of them. He solemnly declares, “I will not send them away fasting.” He would not have his servants indifferent to the sufferings of the poor, even as to the bread which perisheth. We may be doubly sure that he will not long allow

any earnest hearer to faint through spiritual hunger. He may make us wait to awaken appetite; but he will not in the end dismiss us unfed. He loves not to let the hungry famish; he fears “lest they faint in the way.” If any of us are coming near to that state, he perceives it, and will interpose. Let us cultivate an appetite for heavenly food, and Jesus will supply its cravings.

33. *And his disciples say unto him, Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness, as to fill so great a multitude?*

On this second occasion we might have hoped for better things from the disciples; but they are in the old rut; as doubtful as ever, and as much guilty of forgetting their Lord’s power. He said, “I will not send them away fasting”, and they answer his gracious declaration with a hard and chilling question. Note how they forget what HE would do, and dote upon what they cannot do. “Whence should we have so much bread?” Who said anything about “We”? The only good point in their speech is their associating themselves with their Lord at all; but even there they take too prominent a place. They think of their own poverty, of the wilderness, of the “so much bread,” and of the “so great a multitude”; and they forget their “so great” Lord. Are we not too much like them? Are we sure that we are even as wise as they were? We fear not.

34. *And Jesus saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven, and a few little fishes.*

The Lord accepts their association, and says, “How many loaves have ye?” Small as their store was, and utterly insignificant for the work proposed, he allows them to contribute it towards his grand design. They make a rapid inventory, and they speak of it in mournful tones: “Seven loaves, and a few little fishes.” Much like our own poor stock-in-trade for holy service. The loaves were by no means such masses of food as we intend by the English word; they were merely thin cakes. The fishes were few and little; more bones than anything else. So are our abilities slender, and marred with many disabilities; yet we must put all that we have into the common stock, and it will be enough in the hands of him who worketh all things.

35. *And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground.*

The people are prepared for the festival by willingness to obey. What they had seen of our Lord's miraculous power awakened expectation, and created readiness to follow his lead. There is generally a preparedness of mind when Jesus is about to work his wonders of grace. Lord, cause our people to be ready "to sit down on the ground" at thy feast of grace!

36. *And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake them, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.*

He did as aforetime. His way is perfect, and so there was no need for altering it. "He took the seven loaves and the fishes." They only made one handful for him. This shows us that our slender abilities must be placed at his disposal, and in his wonderworking hands. He does not disdain to carry the bread and the fish, though he bears up both heaven and earth. His giving thanks at an outdoor meal should teach us not to eat without thanksgiving. The breaking teaches that there must be expenditure of talent, and that there should be a crumbing down of truth to suit human mouths. His giving the provision into many hands shows that nothing is to be retained in store, but all must be distributed among the many. Our Lord Jesus again honored his disciples by making them the servitors by whom he reached the multitude. Lord, use us: for if we have neither loaf nor fish, we have grilling hands.

37. *And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets full.*

The feast was carried out in a manner so orderly, and with provision so bountiful, that all ate to satisfaction: even little children had their bread and fish. The remainder, the broken food, was too good to waste, and so it was taken up in baskets for future use. The God of abundance is yet the God of frugality. We. want not, but also we waste not. Baskets are always to be had: the difficulty is to fill them. Here the baskets corresponded to the number of the loaves; in the former banquet they corresponded to the number of the apostles. The blessing which rewards service may bear a relation to the workers or to the original supply which they contributed, according to the manner of comparison. In both cases of feeding the multitude, that which was in store after use was greater than that which was at first possessed. The more we give the more we have. May not

some of us be poor because we have given so little away? Might not the most gifted have had more gifts by this time if they had unselfishly laid out what hat they have for the good of others?

38. *And they that did eat were four thousand men, beside women and children.*

Here is no desire to swell out the number, to make the wonder greater. In some religious statistics the tale would be soon told if the women and children were left out, for they are the bulk of the attendants. In the Bible we find the people counted by the number of the males, and Matthew when he took taxes was accustomed so to levy them: that plan is followed here There is no reason why the women and children should be omitted in our enumerations nowadays, since the whole method of census taking has been altered, and both sexes are now included. As the men were the greatest eaters, and the most conspicuous persons, they are counted; and though the rest of the guests were not numbered they were all nourished, which is the main matter.

39. *And he sent away the multitude, and took ship, and came into the coasts of Magadala.*

Our Lord was ever earnest to send the crowds home: he desired not to detain them from their daily labor. He does not want them to attend him as a guard of honor, or as enthusiastic processionists: he speeds away from their praises. He took ship. Like a shuttle through the loom, he crosses and recrosses the lake. He comes “into the coasts of Magdala.” Was he seeking out Mary of Magdala? He had some errand of mercy there. It was soon accomplished, for he was off to sea again. Our Lord was largely a seafaring man. Let sailors run up Christ’s colors, and sail under his command. O Lord Jesus, I would traverse the sea of life with thee as my pilot, owner, and captain!

Matthew 16

1. *The Pharisees also with the Sadducees come, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven.*

The King is again met by his foes. Two sects, which were violently opposed to each other, unite their forces against him. It is the way of the wicked to become friends when seeking the overthrow of the kingdom of heaven.

On this occasion they come not with a question, but with the old demand for a sign. This time it must be “a sign from heaven”, possibly a marvel in the sky. What right had they to set him a test of such a sort as their fancy might suggest? What need for more signs when his miracles were so many? Were not all his miracles signs from heaven? Did not this demand cast a slur on all that he had already done? Was it not a practical ignoring of all his previous works of power? Too often we also have fallen into the weakness of asking a new token of divine love, thus undervaluing former favors. If the evidence we have already received of our Lord’s grace and power is not enough, when will our doubts be ended?

In this demand for a sign, our Lord’s foes were tempting him. Did the temptation lie in urging him to seek his own glory by some ostentatious display of power, for which there would be no real need? Whatever it was, our Lord passed scathless through this ordeal, for there was no pride in him. Pharisees and Sadducees will tempt us also. From their wiles and smiles may the Lord deliver us! From the desire to stand well with men may we be happily freed by our love to Jesus!

2, 3. *He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of*

the times?

They could prognosticate the weather by certain signs, and our Lord Jesus mentions the weather-tokens of Palestine; yet they could not read the plainer and more plentiful warnings of the near future. Weather-signs are doubtful; but there were moral and spiritual tokens around them which could hardly be misunderstood if they would only consider them. Each country has its own sky warnings, and those of Palestine differ from those of England; but the signs of the times are the same in all lands. Our Lord singled out an instance of their supposed weather-wisdom: the same sign which, in the evening, was a token of fair weather, was, in the morning, a mark of foul weather. They were able to draw nice distinctions on the variable condition of "the face of the sky:" why could they not "discern the signs of the times?" They could have seen, if they had chosen to do so, that all the prophecies were one in declaring that the date of Messiah's appearing had arrived; and they could also have observed that every event was fulfilling those prophecies; but they were false at heart, and would not see, and yet cried out for a sign. Signs were all around them, and yet they repeated the parrot cry "Show us a sign." Most justly our Lord was indignant with them, and upbraided them, using the justly severe words, "O ye hypocrites!" Today the men who want more evidences of the supernatural deserve a similar denunciation.

Lord, do not allow any of us to be blind to the heavenly signs, — thy cross, thy resurrection, thy Word, thy Spirit, and thy work of grace, Teach us carefully to "discern" these things as being in very deed the abiding "signs of the times." Even in the growing coldness of the church, and the abounding iniquity of the world, let us see the tokens of thine Advent, and stand waiting and watching for thy long promised appearing.

4. *A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. And he left them, and departed.*

It was not lack of evidence, but the sad depravity of their minds, which set them upon seeking after a sign; and therefore the Lord would not satisfy their unhealthy cranny. They were wicked in morals, and adulterous in heart in their forsaking the one true God; and then they turned round and justified their

unbelief in the Son of God by pleading want of proof, demanding more miracles to enable them to come to a right conclusion. Such is the deceit of man's heart.

Our Lord repeats his former answer: he will give them no other. In the compass of the Old Testament there is no fuller sign of our Lord than Jonah. Our Lord knew that he would fulfill the type of Jonah even in its details, and therefore he points them to that prophet's life. This is a subject which deserves our careful meditation, but we cannot enlarge upon it here. Our Lord looks to his death and resurrection, and gives the prophet Jonas as his sign. Jesus will be buried, and will rise on the third day, and in the power of his resurrection, will win the Gentiles to repentance: in this he will be the antitype of Jonah, and this shall be the sign that he is indeed the Christ of God. This our Lord had said before, and he here repeated it, because it was a sufficient reply, and there was no need to study variety with a set of people who, themselves, harped perpetually upon one string.

Our Lord quitted such persons, for there was nothing to be done with them. "lie left them, and departed", and that place saw him no more. Lord, do not leave any one of us; for that would be a sure sentence of death to us.

5. *And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread.*

They had forgotten to victual their boat. This they seem to have found out for themselves as soon as they "were come to the other side." They seldom forgot such temporal matters. Possibly they trusted each other, and what was every man's business was nobody's business. They did not notice the omission while they were crossing the sea; but mealtime came, and their minds were quickly brought to think of the loaves. Controversy had for a while engrossed their minds with religious matters; but lack of bread, and consequent hunger soon recalled them to the things of earth.

6. *Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*

He used a parabolic expression, which they would readily have understood, had not their minds been already absorbed by their lack of bread. He saw that in

them, too, there would soon be a desire for a sign, now that they needed bread; and he feared the influence of both the Ritualism of the Pharisee, and the Rationalism of the Sadducee upon his little church. Hence his double word, "Take heed, and beware." The warning is needed today as much as in our Lord's time: possibly it is even more required, and will be less regarded. "Pharisees and Sadducees" are both leavening the churches, and the spirit of the one is as bad as that of the other Everywhere we see the one evil force, operating in two opposite ways, but rapidly leavening the meal of nominal Christendom. Lord, save thy people from this souring and corrupting influence!

7. *And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have taken no bread.*

Their thoughts ran along the low material level from leaven to bread. Did they imagine that he forbade their borrowing leaven from the Pharisees when they began to make a batch of bread? How could they have found any meaning in the literal sense of leaven as applied to Sadducees? They were earthbound by anxiety, or they could not have blundered so foolishly. When a number of hungry men are together, is it not very natural that they should look at everything with hungry eyes? Yes, it is natural; and it is not natural to men to be spiritual. We need to pray that we may not reason among ourselves after the same groveling fashion, when we come into a little need.

8-10. *Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?*

Want of faith made them thus dull and carnal. Want of bread would not have troubled them if they had possessed more grace. Our Lord as good as says to them, "Why begin raising questions as to what can be done under this small difficulty? Have I not dealt with far greater necessities? :Have not your own personal wants been richly supplied? Has your store been exhausted even when all your thoughts have gone out towards the multitude, and all your store of bread and fish has been given up to them? What occasion can there be for

anxiety in my presence, when I have always supplied your wants?"

How foolish they were, but how like we are to them! We seem to learn nothing. After years of experience, our Lord has to say, "Do ye not yet understand, neither remember?" Two stupendous miracles had not lifted those disciples to that plane of thought which is becoming in believers; and after all our experiences and deliverances, we, alas! are much as they were. How our mind dwells on the bread which we are wanting, and how readily it forgets former times when all such wants were abundantly supplied! The many baskets which were so amply filled by former providences were the disciples' own share and store, and therefore they ought not to have forgotten the miraculous festivals. Even the empty baskets should have refreshed their memories, and reminded them of how they had twice been filled. If it were not for our wretched little faith, and our reasoning among ourselves, the memory of our former deliverances would lift us beyond all tendency to mistrust our God.

O sacred Spirit, teach us, or we shall never learn! Make us wise, or we shall still continue in the folly of carnal reasoning!

11. *How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that you should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?*

At bottom it was unbelief which clouded their understanding. Jesus may well say to doubters, "Ye do not understand." Truly, nothing more effectually blunts spiritual perception than an overpowering anxiety for the bread which perisheth. When a doctrine is not understood, it may not always be the fault of the teacher. Very plain speaking is frequently misunderstood when the mind is absorbed in pressing needs. It was sad to see apostles taking our Lord literally, and failing to see the obvious parable of his words. How could "the leaven of the Pharisee" be a term used concerning bread?

12. *Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*

The doctrine of these sectaries had a secret, insinuating, and souring influence;

and the disciples must carefully watch lest even a little of its spirit and teaching should get into their minds, and then spread throughout their whole nature. Both these leavens may be at work at once in the same community; in fact, they are only one leaven. The two sets of opponents assailed the Lord Jesus at the same time, for they had a common ground of opposition against him. To this day these two forms of evil are ever working, either secretly or openly, and we have need to beware of them at all times. It is well to understand this, and both purge out the old leaven of Pharisaism, and keep out the new leaven of Sadduceeism. Self-righteousness and carnal reasoning must alike be cast out. Faith will find them both to be her deadly foes. Many are amusing themselves with the evil leaven; and before they are aware, the unhallowed thing will defile them. To be evangelical, and yet to be superstitious or rationalistic at the same time, is next to impossible. Certain of our contemporaries are trying to bake with this leaven, but their bread will be sour. BEWARE!

13. *When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*

Our Lord knew well enough what the people thought of him; but he asked his disciples the question that he might instruct them after the Socratic method by drawing out their own minds. Our Lord was about to inform them as to his death, and it was well that they should have very clear ideas as to who he was. He begins by asking, “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” Human opinions about heavenly, things count for little; yet it is as well to know them, that we may be prepared to withstand them.

14. *And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.*

These wore all conjectures, and far from the mark; yet was there some likeness to truth in them all. Herod’s notion that Jesus was John the Baptist, newly risen from the dead, seemed a probable one to many, since our Lord had like courage and fidelity with John. Elijah, too, seemed to live again in our Lord’s words of fire; Jeremiah was revived in his constant sorrow; and the prophets were repeated in his memorable teachings and marvelous life. Since many of these were types of him, it is small wonder that he should seem to be identical with them. Yet men make no discovery of the Lord’s true character by their own

guesswork: only those to whom he reveals himself will ever know him.

Error has many voices; truth alone is one, and abiding. Men say differing things concerning our Lord; but his Spirit alone bears effectual witness to the one true Christ of God.

15. *He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

This is a far more searching question. Our personal thoughts of Jesus touch a vital point. Our Lord presupposes that his disciples would not have the same thoughts as "men" had. They would not follow the spirit of the age, and shape their views by those of the "cultured" persons of the period. They would have formed a judgment, each one for himself, by what they, had heard and seen while in his company. Therefore, he enquired, "But whom say ye that I am?" Let each reader answer the question before he goes further.

16. *And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

Peter, as usual, was spokesman for the rest; and he spoke right well. He had perceived the Messiahship and the divine Sonship of his Lord, and in outspoken words he uttered his inward belief. It was a simple but satisfactory Confession of Faith. We should always be ready to give an answer to those who would know what we believe on a matter so central as the person and nature of our Lord. A mistake on this point would involve all our religion in failure. If he is not to us the Christ, the Lord's Anointed and "the Son of the living God," we know not Jesus aright.

17. *And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona. for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.*

His old name is mentioned to bring out the distinction between what he was by nature and what grace had made him. Simon Bar-Jona, the fluttering son of a dove, has now become Peter, a rock. He was a happy man to be taught of God on the central truth of revelation. He had not arrived at his belief by mere reason:

flesh and blood had not worked out the problem; there had been a revelation to him from the Father who is in heaven. To know the Lord in mere doctrinal statement, no such divine teaching is required; but Peter's full assurance of his Lord's nature and mission was no theory in the head: the truth had been written on his heart by the heavenly Spirit. This is the only knowledge worth having as to the person of our Lord, for it brings a blessing with it, — a blessing from the mouth of the Lord Jesus: "Blessed art thou."

18. *And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

"Thou art Peter," a piece of rock; and on that rock of which thou art a piece "I will build my church." He had, by the revelation of the Father, come to know the Son, and to be identified with him: thus he was a stone of the one Rock. Christ is the Rock, and Peter has become one with him, and "upon this rock" is the church founded. If there had been no Romanists to twist this passage, it would have presented no difficulty. Jesus is the Builder, and he and his apostles make up the first course of stone in the great temple of the church, and this first course is one with the eternal Rock on which it rests. In the first twelve courses or foundations are the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:14). We are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone." Apostles are not the foundation of our confidence meritoriously; but they underlie us as to date, and we rest upon their testimony concerning Jesus and his resurrection.

The assembly which Christ gathers he builds together; for he says, "I will build my church." He builds on a firm foundation: "Upon this rock I will build." What Jesus builds is his own: "my church." He makes his rock-founded building into a stronghold, against which the powers of evil lay continual siege, but all in vain; for "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

19. *And I will gave unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven..*

The new kingdom would not be all-comprehensive, like Noah's ark; but would have its dove and its keys. For practical purposes the people of God would need

discipline, and the power to receive, retain, or exclude members. Of these keys our Lord says to Peter, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Foremost among the apostles, Peter used those keys at Pentecost, when he let three thousand into the church; in Jerusalem, when he shut out Ananias and Sapphira; and at the house of Cornelius, when he admitted the Gentiles. Our Lord committed to his church power to rule within herself for him; not to set up doors, but to open or shut them: not to make laws, but to obey them and see them obeyed. Peter, and those for whom he spoke, became the stewards of the Lord Jesus in the church, and their acts were endorsed by their Lord. Today the Lord continues to back up the teaching and acts of his sent servants, those Peters who are pieces of the one Rock. The judgments of his Church, when rightly administered, have his sanction so as to make them valid. The words of his sent servants, spoken in his name, shall be confirmed of the Lord, and shall not be, either as to promise or threatening, a mere piece of rhetoric. When he was here on earth our Lord himself personally admitted men into the select circle of disciples; but on the eve of his departure he gave to their leading spirit, and thus to them also, the power to admit others to their number, or to dismiss them when found unworthy. Thus was the church or assembly constituted, and endowed with internal administrative authority. We cannot legislate, but we may and must administer the ordinances and statutes of the Lord; and what we do rightly in carrying out divine law in the church on earth is ratified by our Lord in heaven. A church would be a mere sham, and its acts a solemn farce, if the great Head of the Church did not sanction all that is done according to his statute-book.

We need not at any length deal with the claims of the Pope of Rome. Even if Peter had been made the head of the church, how would that affect the bishop of Rome? As well say that the Cham of Tartary is the successor of Peter, as make that claim for an Italian Pontiff. No unsophisticated reader of his Bible sees any trace of Popery in this passage. The wine of Romanism is not to be pressed out of this cluster.

20. *Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.*

As yet they were to be silent as to our Lord’s highest claims, for fear the people should in rash zeal set him up as king by force of arms. It was dangerous to tell such an ill-instructed multitude what they would be sure to misunderstand and misuse. The command to tell no man must have sounded very strangely in the

disciples' ears. It was no business of theirs to discover the reason of their Lord's orders; it was enough for them to do as he bade them. We are under no such embargo, and therefore we will tell to all that our Lord is the Savior, the Anointed of God, or, as he has himself worded it, "Jesus the Christ."

21. *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.*

The Church or Assembly being now actually arranged, and treated as a fact, our Lord began to prepare his disciples for the time when, as an associated body, they would have to act alone, because he would be taken from them. Their first great trial would be his death, of which he had spoken darkly before. "From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples" his death more plainly. There is a fit time for painful disclosures, and our Lord is wise in selecting it. He mentions the gathering together of his foes: "elders and chief priests and scribes" will eagerly unite. Their fury will show itself in multiplied cruelties: he will suffer many things. He declares that they will push their enmity to the bitter end; he will "be killed." He foretells that he will "be raised again" and he specifies the time, namely, "the third day." All this must have fallen sadly on the ears of men who still indulged visions of a kingdom of a very different sort. The most of them were wisely silent in their sadness, yet there was one who had far too bold a tongue.

22. *Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.*

Peter could not be trusted as steward or major-domo. He takes too much upon himself. See, how great he is! He half fancies that he is the master. He loved his Lord so well that he could not bear to hear of his being killed, and he would gladly stop him from talking upon a subject so terribly sad. He thinks the Lord is morbid, and is attaching more importance to the opposition of the Pharisees than it deserves. Therefore he gets the Lord alone, and chides him. The words are very strong: "Peter took him, and began to rebuke him." He meant to be his Lord's candid friend, and at the same time to maintain towards him that

respectful bearing which would be becoming in his follower; but evidently he took too much on himself when he ventured to rebuke his Lord. He could see in our Lord's death nothing but ruin to the cause, and therefore he felt it must not be. He implored the mercy of heaven to forbid so dire a catastrophe. "Be it far from thee, Lord." It must not, cannot fall out as Jesus had prophesied. "This shall not be unto thee." He would even drive such an idea out of our Lord's mind. Should we not have done the same, had we been there, if we had been as much concerned for the honor of our Lord as Peter was? Should we not have been horror-stricken at the idea that such a One as he should be put to a cruel death? Might we not have vowed in terrible earnest, "This shall not be unto thee "?

23. *But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the thing that be of God, but those that be of men.*

Our Lord was superior to the temptation which grew out of the very love of his friend. He would remain no longer aside with Peter: he turned away from him. Seeing the devil using Peter as his instrument, he addresses Satan himself, and Peter too, so far as he was identified with the evil suggestion. "Get thee behind me, Satan." The attempt was made to put a stumbling-block in that path of self-sacrifice which our Lord intended to pursue, even to the bitter end. He spied out the hindrance, and said, "Thou art an offense unto me." His dearest friend was his direst foe when he would put him off from his life-work The devil thought to succeed through our Lord's newly appointed foreman; but Jesus made short work of the temptation: he threw the stone out of the road, and cast it behind him, so that he could not be stumbled. The pith of the error was that Peter looked at things from the point of view of human honor and success, and not from that grand standpoint in which the glory of God in the salvation of men swallows up everything.

A marvel is here. A man may know what only the Father can reveal, and yet he may not savor the things, that be of God. Unless he accepts the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, he has no savor for divine things. He who does not heartily rejoice in the atonement does not discern that sweet savor of rest which the Lord God perceives in the great sacrifice, and therefore he has no fellowship in the things that be of God. He knows not the taste, the aroma, the essence of spiritual things; and however much he may honor Jesus in words, he is an enemy, yea, a real Satan towards the true Christ, whose very substance is his work as our atoning

sacrifice. Those who at this day revile the substitutionary sacrifice of our Lord, are fonder of the things that be of men than those that be of God. They are loud in their claim to be great philanthropists; but sound theologians they are not.- Eumanitarians they may be; but divines they cannot be. They may be the friends of man; but they are not the servants of God. How sorrowfully do we write these words when we think of the many preachers to whom they apply!

24. *Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

As our Lord, to fulfill his destiny, must sacrifice himself, so also must every one who would be his follower. To keep close to our Lord (which he intends by the words “come after me,”) we must have done with self; for he denied himself to redeem his people. We must not know self, nor assent to it; but we must each one “deny himself.” Doing this, each man must cheerfully shoulder his own personal burden of sorrow and service, and carry it with self-sacrifice, as Jesus carried his cross.

He had told them of his cross; now he tells them of their own crosses. They might now choose again whether they could and would follow him. With their increased information as to his destiny, the question was again set before them, whether they would follow or forsake him. If they did continue to be his followers, it must be as cross-bearers and self-deniers. Nor are the terms altered in these days. Do we accept them? Can we keep step in the long procession of cross-carriers, or will we fall in with the spirit of the age, and say fine things about Jesus, while we deny his substitutionary sacrifice, and shirk the personal self - denial which he demands? Our own wisdom, if it leads us to think lightly of “the precious blood”, must be utterly denied and even abhorred.

25. *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it,*

Now they were to practice the doctrine he had taught them before. They could only save their real selves by the loss of this present life; but if they settled it in their own minds that they must first and foremost save their outer life, it would be at the expense of their truest being. To tell them plainly of this was honest dealing on our Lord’s part; and it argued well for the disciples that they still

remained faithful to him. Alas! there was one even of the chosen twelve who probably at this very moment was scheming how he could continue to keep the bag, and yet could ultimately escape from the consequences of his Master's demand.

26. *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

If he loses his real life, how can he profit, even if the world be his? The true gain or loss is a gain or loss of life. All external things are trifles compared with that life. Even now, "What is a man profited?" He has no real life in Christ, and what is all else that he may possess? What but a painted pageantry with which he is amusing his soul upon the brink of hell? As to the world to come, there is no question. To lose eternal life is overwhelming loss indeed.

Nothing can be compared with eternal life. The soul's value cannot be estimated by ordinary reckonings. Worlds on worlds were a poor price. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul" Barter is out of the question. His soul is so a man's sole inheritance that if he has lost it he has lost all.

27. *For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*

There will come a day when Christ, from the judgment-seat, will make it appear who was wise in his way of life; for then shall the reward or the punishment throw its light on the past conduct of men. He who was himself despised shall be the Rewarder of those who laid down their lives for the sake of his cause. In that day the crucified "Son of man shall come in glory": that glory will be seen to be "the glory of his Father"; that divine glory will be illustrated by hosts of attendant angels. In all the pomp of heaven he shall distribute the rewards of the last assize. The righteous shall through divine grace have their works taken as evidence of their love to God; and the wicked shall with justice have their doom appointed according to their works, because those works will be the evidence that they had not the faith which produces good works.

Lord, by thy good Spirit, keep me ever in mind of that great day of days, which will make eternity bright with immeasurable bliss, or dark with unutterable woe!

May I look at everything in the blaze of light which surrounds thy judgment-seat!

28. *Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.*

So near was that reign which would repay the losses of the saints for Christ's sake, that before certain of them were dead the Lord would have held a rehearsal of it in his judgment of Israel, by the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and would have set up his kingdom, of which the judgment- seat is an index and an instrument.

We have here a difficult passage, and this appears to be the simplest way of reading it in its connection. Our Lord seems to say, "Through suffering and death I pass to a throne; and by that fact it shall be seen that loss and death are often the way to true gain and real life. That kingdom of mine is not far away and unreal: some of you will see me in the exercise of my royal power before you die.

Yet it has been thought that it means that some would never really taste of death, or know the fullness of its terrible meaning, till the judgment day. This is true, but it can scarcely be the teaching in this place.

Matthew 17

1. *And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun and his raiment was white as the light.*

Were these “six days,” a week’s quiet interval, in which our Lord prepared himself for the singular transaction upon the “mountain apart”? Did the little company of three know from one Sabbath to another that such an amazing joy awaited them? The three were elect out of the elect, and favored to see what none else in all the world might behold. Doubtless our Lord had reasons for his choice, as he has for every choice he makes; but he does not unveil them to us. The same three beheld the agony in the garden; perhaps the first sight was necessary to sustain their faith under the second.

The name of the “high mountain” can never be known; for those who knew the locality have left no information. Tabor, if you please; Hermon, if you prefer it. No one can decide. It was a lone and lofty hill.

While in prayer, the splendor of the Lord shone out. His face, lit up with its own inner glory, became a sun; and all his dress, like clouds irradiated by that sun became white as the light itself “He was transfigured before them”: he alone was the center of what they saw. It was a marvelous unveiling of the hidden nature of the Lord Jesus. Then was, in one way, fulfilled the word of John: “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.”

The transfiguration occurred but once: special views of the glory of Christ are not enjoyed every day. Our highest joy on earth is to see Jesus. There can be no greater bliss in heaven; but we shall be better able to endure the exceeding bliss when we have laid aside the burden of this flesh.

3. *And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*

Thus the Law and the Prophets, “Moses and Elias”, communed with our Lord, “talking with him”; and entering into familiar conversation with their Lord. Saints long departed still live; live in their personality; are known by their names; and enjoy near access to Christ. It is a great joy to holy ones to be with Jesus: they find it heaven to be where they can talk with him. The heads of former dispensations conversed with the Lord as to his decease, by which a new economy I would be ushered in. After condescending so long to his ignorant followers, it must have been a great relief to the human soul of Jesus to talk with two master-minds like those of Moses and Elijah. What a sight for the apostles, this glorious trio! They “appeared unto them”, but they “talked with him”: the object of the two holy ones was not to converse with apostles, but with their Master. Although saints are seen of men, their fellowship is with Jesus.

4. *Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

The sight spoke to the three beholders, and they felt bound to answer to it. Peter must speak: “Then answered Peter.” That which is uppermost comes out: “Lord!, it is good for us to be here.” Everybody was of his opinion. Who would not have been? Because it was so good, he would fain stay in this beatific state, and get still more good from it. But he has not lost his reverence, and therefore he would have the great ones sheltered suitability. He submits the proposal to Jesus: “If thou wilt.” He offers that, with his brethren, he will plan and build shrines for the three holy ones: “Let us make here three tabernacles.” He does not propose to build for himself, and James, and John; but he says, “One for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.” His talk sounds rather like that of a bewildered child. He wanders a little; yet his expression is a most natural one. Who would not wish to abide in such society as this? Moses, and Elias, and Jesus: what company! But yet how unpractical is Peter! How selfish the one thought, “It is good for us!” What was to be done for the rest of the twelve, and for the other disciples, and for the wide, wide world? A sip of such bliss might be good for the three, but to continue to drink thereof might not have been really good even for them. Peter knew not what he said. The like might be said of many another

excited utterance of enthusiastic saints.

5. *While he yet spake, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.*

"While he yet spake." Such wild talk might well be interrupted. What a blessed interruption! We may often thank the Lord for stopping our babbling. "A bright cloud overshadowed them." It was bright, and cast a shadow. They felt that they were entering it, and feared as they did so. It was a singular experience; yet we have had it repeated in our own cases. Do we not know what it is to get shadow out of brightness, and "a voice out of the cloud"? This is after the frequent manner of the Lord in dealing with his favored ones.

The voice was clear and distinct. First came the divine attestation of the Sonship of our Lord, "This is my beloved Son," and the Father's declaration of delight in him, — "in whom I am well pleased." What happiness for us that Jehovah is well pleased in Christ, and with all who are in him! Then followed the consequent divine requirement, "Hear ye him." It is better to hear the Son of God than to see saints, or to build tabernacles. This will please the Father more than all else that love can suggest.

The good pleasure of the Father in the Lord Jesus is a conspicuous part of his glory. The voice conveyed to the ear a greater glory than the luster of light could communicate through the eye. The audible part of the transfiguration was as wonderful as the visible; in fact, it would seem, from the next verse, to have been more so.

6. *And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face and were sore afraid.*

Yes, the voice overcame them. Deeper impression was produced by the words of the Lord than by the blinding light. "When the disciples hear it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid." They were in the immediate presence of God, and listening to the Father's voice: well might they lie prostrate and tremble. Too clear a manifestation of God, even though it related to Jesus, would rather overpower than empower us. The three disciples said no more about building

tabernacles, but as one man, “They fell on their face.” Awe is the end of talk: in this case it looked as if it were the end of consciousness; but this was only a temporary swoon, from which they would recover, and be all the more joyous.

7. *And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.*

Jesus had seemed to go away from them, lost in a cloud of brightness; but now he “came and touched them.” His communings with pure spirits did not make him disdain the touch of feeble flesh. Oh, the sweet comfort of that gentle touch! It aroused, consoled, and strengthened his amazed and trembling disciples. The touch of the manhood is more reassuring to poor flesh and blood than the blaze of the Godhead. The voice from heaven casts down; but the word from Jesus is, “Arise.” The Father’s voice made them sore afraid, but Jesus says, “Be not afraid.” Glorious God, how much we bless thee for the Mediator!

8. *And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.*

Closed were their eyes, because of “the too transporting light”; and they dared not open them till they felt the touch of Jesus. Then they lifted up their eyes. What did they see?

Moses, and Elias, and the exceeding brightness had all gone, and they had come back to the common-places of their life with Jesus. “They saw no man,” but they had lest nothing, since Jesus remained. They had gained by the vanishing of the shining ones, since they could see Jesus all the better, and their attention was not divided. The vision of his transfiguration had blinded them, had stupefied them; but to see “Jesus only” was to come back to practical life, and to have the best of all sights still left to them. Oh, that we also may have the eye of our mind so fixed on the Lord as our one object, that HE may fill the whole field of our vision, and we may see Jesus only!

9. *And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.*

What they had seen would confirm their own confidence, and remain a secret spring of delight to them; but as it would require great faith in others to believe it, they were to “tell the vision to no man.” The transfiguration would be as hard to believe as the incarnation itself; and there could be no practical use in making demands upon a faith which scarcely existed. Until the greatest confirmation of all was given in our Lord’s resurrection, the vision on the Holy Mount would be rather a tax upon faith than a support of it in the case of those who did not themselves personally see it, but only heard the apostle’s report of it. It is wise not to overload testimony. There is a time for making known the higher truths; for out of season these may burden, rather than assist, enquiring minds. What a secret these men had to keep! They did keep it; but they never forgot it, nor ceased to feel its influence.

Now that the Son, of man is risen again from the dead, no doctrine needs to be kept back. In bringing life and immortality to light, our Lord has rent away the veil which had long concealed the higher mysteries of the gospel His coming out of the grave has set free all buried truth. It is idle, not to say sinful, to be silent about the deep things of God now that “the Lord is risen indeed.” Yet some preachers we could name never mention election, the covenant, or final perseverance by the year together.

10. *And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?*

One by one the difficulties of the disciples are stated to their Lord, and their solution is soon given. One of these concerned Elijah; and as he had been just now before them, they were led to mention it. “Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?” This is the report of men who have studied our Scriptures, that Elias comes before the Lord’s appearing. No doubt it staggered their minds when they had it put in some such logical fashion as this,—

Messiah cannot come till Elijah has appeared; Elijah has not appeared;

Therefore Jesus is not the Messiah.

11, 12. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come*

already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them.

"Jesus answered": he has an answer for all questions, and we shall do well to bring our difficulties to him to hear his replies. Our Lord admits that Elias must come before the Messiah: "Elias truly shall first come"; but he asserts that the person intended by the prophecy "is come already" and that the evil ones "have done unto him whatsoever they listed." This cleared up the doubt at once. Then Jesus went on to say that what had been done to the true Elias would also be done to himself, the Messiah. Jesus himself must die by a cruel death: "Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them." How simple the explanation of the difficulty! How often has, it happened that we have been looking for that which has already come, or have been perplexed by a doctrine which, when it has been opened to us by the Holy Spirit, has proved full of instruction and comfort. Without divine teaching we drown in the shadows; but with it we swim the fathomless deeps.

13. *Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.*

"Then the disciples understood": our Lord's instructive word opened their understandings. When he teaches, the dullest scholars learn. Now they see that John the Baptist was Elijah redivivus. He was a stern admonisher of kings, and preached repentance to Israel. He had come to restore all things: and so the Messiah had not appeared without being preceded by the true Elias. This was plain enough, to them when once their Lord had made them understand. Lord, evermore, not only speak with us, but cause us to comprehend thy word!

14-16. *And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying, lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic, and sore vexed: for ofttimes he falleth into the fire and oft into the water. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.*

Down from communion with saints, and the confirmation of his claims by the Father's voice, our Lord comes to give battle to the devil. Our Moses descends

from the mount, and finds evil exultant in the multitude below. During his absence, the enemy had triumphed over his feeble followers. In the midst of jeering adversaries, the disciples had tried in vain to cast out an evil spirit from a youth who had been rendered lunatic by its horrible possession. The poor disappointed father appeals to the Lord at once most humbly, states the case clearly, and pleads most fittingly. His epileptic son was a lunatic, sore sexed with pain, and in grievous peril through sudden falls. The case was a shocking one to have in one's presence: the cries and contortions which attend epilepsy are frequently terrible to hear and see. The disciples had evidently done their very best; and as they had on other occasions cast out devils, they were surprised to find themselves defeated; but defeated they were, for the despairing father truthfully cried, "I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him." Alas, poor man, thou didst but speak as all have done since, when they have trusted in disciples, and not alone in their Master! Wise was it On thy part to hasten to Jesus, kneeling down to him, and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son."

How often does sin drive men to one extreme or the other! "Ofttimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water." Certain men are moonstruck and pained at one time, yet hard and callous at another; for a season raving with excitement, and soon afterwards dead as a stone. When sin reveals itself in connection with wildness of mind, it is hard to deal with. Hew often have anxious soul-winners been obliged to confess concerning a certain individual that "they could not cure him"! We have been foiled by a person of a singular temperament, and the passion which possessed him has been peculiarly ungovernable. Possibly he had no link towards better things but all aged parent, whose pleadings piteously held us in deep anxiety for the half-lunatic and altogether depraved young man. Willing as we were to reform and restore the wretched rebel, we were altogether unable to help. It needed in our case that Jesus should come, even as in the narrative before us. Lord, do not leave us; for if apostles could do nothing without thee, poor weaklings are we!

17. *Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.*

The whole generation among whom he lived caused the Savior suffering by their want of faith, and the absence of that straightforward confidence in God which

would have secured them the greatest blessings. His own disciples — he had been with them, and yet they had not learned to have faith in him. The scribes and Pharisees—he had suffered from them many times already, and now they must make a poor lunatic the center of conflict with him. He had been in fellowship with heaven, and it was terrible jar to his heart to come down among such an unruly and unbelieving company. They were both "faithless and, perverse" the two things commonly go together: those who will not believe will not obey.

What a trial was all this to our Lord's holy and gracious mind! "How long shall I suffer you?" Must I continue in such unworthy company? "How long shall I suffer you" Must I always be thus tried by your ill manners? It was a moment when his triumphant foes and unbelieving friends alike deserved rebuke. But the word once spoken, Jesus will not leave the poor sufferer before him to endure the malicious attacks of the evil spirit.

See how our royal Captain turns the tide of battle with a word! He transferred the fight from the disciples to himself: "Bring him hither to me." Once in the circle of our Lord's own power; all is done. "Bring him hither to me." Never let us forget this precept. When most self-despairing, let us be Christ-confiding.

18. *And Jesus rebuked the devil: and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.*

"Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed." One word from Christ, and Satan flees. Hark calls this evil spirit "dumb and deaf", but he heard Jesus, and answered to his voice with a cry; and rending the child terribly, came out of him, never to return.

"The child was cured from that very hour"; that is to say, at once and for ever. God grant us faith to bring our boys and girls to the Lord Jesus with confidence in his power to cure them, and cure them for all future life! Even though young people may have become violent in temper, and precocious in vice, the Lord can at once subdue the evil power. There was no need for the boy to wait till he grew up. He was under the power of the devil while a child, and he was cured as a child. Let us seek the salvation of children as children.

19. *Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not*

we cast him out?

This was a very proper question. When we make a failure, let us own that we have failed, take the blame of it to ourselves, and apply to our Lord for his gracious intervention. When we are beaten, let it be said of us, “Then came the disciples to Jesus.” Let us make a private, personal matter of it: “They, came to Jesus apart.” Let us sit humbly at our Lord’s feet to receive rebuke or instruction as he sees fit.

20. *And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, It ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain , Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*

Want of faith is the great cause of failure among disciples, both as to themselves and their work for others. There may be other specific maladies in certain cases, but this is the great and main cause of all failure: “Because of your unbelief.” If there had been true faith, of the real and living kind, the disciples could have wrought any miracle, even to the moving of a mountain. Whatever faith we may have, we shall not work a miracle, for this is not the age of prodigies. Is our faith therefore limited in its sphere? Far from it. We can now by faith accomplish that which is fit and right without miracles. Our faith may be small “as a grain of mustard seed,” but if it be living and true it links us with the Omnipotent One. Still is it true, “Ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and, it shall remove.” Mountains shall move before our faith by means as sure as if they were miraculous; by means even more wonderful than if the course of nature had been changed. Comparatively speaking, the suspension of natural law is a coarse expedient; but for the Lord to work the same result without violating any of his laws is an achievement not less divine than a miracle. This is what faith obtains of the Lord at the present hour: her prayer is heard, and things impossible to herself are wrought by divine power. Spiritually and symbolically, the mountain is removed. Literally, at this hour the mountain stands, but faith finds a way round it, through it, or over it; and so in effect removes it.

In the mission field, mountains of exclusiveness which shut out missionaries have been removed. In ordinary life, insurmountable difficulties are graciously dissolved. In a variety of ways, before real faith hindrances disappear, according

to the word of the Lord Jesus — “Nothing shall be impossible”

21. *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*

Though want of faith was the chief hindrance to the healing of the poor lunatic child, yet the case was one in which special means were needed. Faith would have suggested and supplied these special means: since they were absolutely necessary in the case if the disciples were to succeed in it, faith would have exercised herself in them. With God all things are equally possible; but to us, one devil may be harder to deal with than another. One kind will go at a word, but of others it may be said, “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.” He that would overcome the devil in certain instances must first overcome heaven by prayer’ and conquer himself by self-denial. The drink-devil is one of the kind, which may suredly be conquered by faith; and yet we must generally use much intercession God-ward, and total abstinence, as an example man-ward, before we can displace this demon. Our business in the world is to deliver men from the power of the devil, and we must go to Jesus to learn the way. No amount either of prayer or self-denial must be spared if we can thereby deliver one soul from the power of evil; and true faith in God will enable us to put up the prayer and practice the self-denial. May be, some of us have failed because we are not yet well instructed in the right method of procedure. Either we are trying faith without using the appointed means, or we are using the means but not exercising simple faith in God; and in either case we shall make a failure of it. If we go to work by faith in God, in Christ’s own way, we shall drive out the evil spirit.

22, 23. *And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry.*

Our Lord returned often to the solemn subject of his death at the hands of men. It was on his own mind, and therefore he spake of it to his disciples. Their minds were far too receptive of other notions in reference to his kingdom, and therefore he set before them the truth again and again, almost in the same words. He would banish all dreams of a worldly monarchy from their souls. His death would be a grievous trial to them, and he would prepare them for it. He now speaks of his being betrayed: this was ever a bitter drop in his cup of gall. The

Son of man comes to save men, and is, by a man, “betrayed into the hands of men.” For man he lived, by man he is betrayed, and by man he died. Full well he foresaw that “they shall kill him.” O suicidal world! Will nothing content thee but the blood of God’s own Son?

Our Lord would have us preach much about his death now that it is accomplished, for he continually talked of it while yet in the future. No theme is so vital, so practical, so needful.

His penetrating mind realized death, and anticipated that third day, when the word would be fulfilled, — “He shall be raised again.” This was the light of the morning which would have banished the darkness of despair from the minds of the disciples, if they had understood and believed. An old writer says, “He sugared the bitter pill of his death with the sweetness o£ his assured resurrection.”

Our Lord well knew what he said, and he used plain terms; but speak as he might, his followers could only in part apprehend his meaning; and that part made them “exceeding sorry.” Christ’s words, half understood, may cause the heart great grief. Yet, it may be, this cooling cloud of fear calmed their minds, and kept them from that fanaticism which filled the air around them. He knew best what state of mind would be safest for them at that time; and he knows the same as to us at this moment.

24. *And when they were come to Capernaum,, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?*

The half-shekel tribute was a religious payment, based originally on law, but enlarged by a custom which had no support in Scripture. It was ordained by the divine law to be paid for each person to the Lord when the people were counted. From this redemption money there was no exemption; but it was not a tax levied year by year. It had gradually grown into a fashion among professedly religious people to pay this “tribute money” every year; but the payment was entirely optional. Thus, it was established by custom, but it had not been appointed by law, and could not be enforced by it. It was a voluntary annual gift, and only persons who were professed devotees of the Jewish religion would pay it. Such religionists as these would be very particular, not only to pay the annual tribute,

but to have it known that they paid it. The collectors of half-shekels did not apply at once to Jesus, of whom, it may be, they stood in salutary awe; but they addressed Peter with the somewhat ensnaring question, “Doth not your master pay tribute? “As much as to say, “Surely he does so: we would not suspect him of neglecting to do so. A person of such eminence cannot fail to be peculiarly exact as to this customary fee.”

25, 26. *He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What thinkest thou, Simon? of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute? of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto him, Of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, Then are the children free.*

Peter was in such a hurry to vindicate his Lord that he compromised him. “He saith, Yes.” He might have asked his Lord’s mind, or he might have referred the collectors to Jesus himself; but he was in a hurry, and thought himself safe enough in maintaining his Master’s reputation. He was quite certain that his Lord would do all that good people did. Our Savior and his cause have often suffered from the zeal of friends. Christ is better known by what he says himself than by what his friends say for him.

Peter was out of doors at the time he gave his quick reply, and little did he think that the Lord Jesus would note what he had said, and tell him of it as soon as he was come into the house; but so it was.

Our Lord began with Peter upon the subject before he had time to state his action or defend it: “Jesus prevented him.” He knew what his servant had been doing, and he hastened to set him right. As he had been but little of a Peter in this case, our Lord calls him “Simon.” He questions him: “What thinkest thou, Simon?” He will make him judge in the case. Do kings take poll-tax of their own children, or of strangers? Of course, the family of the prince was always free from the levy. The king’s subjects, and especially the aliens under his rule, must pay the capitation charge; but the princes of the blood royal were free. Should Jesus pay redemption-money for himself to God? Should he, who is himself the King’s Son, come under poll-tax to his Father? If tribute money has become a tax to be levied in the kingdom of God, “then are the children free.” Neither Jesus nor Peter was bound to pay. Peter had not seen the matter in this light.

27. *Notwithstanding, lest we should of send them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee.*

Our Savior would not willingly give ground for offense. He was not bound to pay; but rather than raise a scandal, he would pay both for himself and for Peter. How gracious were his words: “Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them”! If the question had remained by itself, clear from other circumstances, our Lord might, on principle, have declined to pay the tribute-money; but Peter’s rash declaration had compromised his Lord, and he would not seem to be false to the promise made by his follower. Besides, Peter would be involved in a dispute, and Jesus will far rather pay than leave his servant in a difficulty. When the pocket is involved in a matter of principle, we must be careful that we do not even seem to be saving our money by a pretense. Usually, it will be wisest to pay under protest, lest it should appear that we are careful of conscience in a special degree when we can also be careful of our cash.

The manner of payment prevented the act from compromising our Lord. Very interesting was the hooking of the fish which brought the silver in its mouth. “Take up fish that first cometh up and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shall find a piece of money.” Very remarkable the providence which caused the shekel to fall into the sea, and made the fish first to swallow it, and then to rise to the hook as soon as Peter began his angling. Thus the great Son pays the tax levied for his Father’s house; but he exercises his royal prerogative in the act, and takes the shekel out of the royal treasury. As man he pays, but first as God he causes the fish to bring him the shekel in its mouth.

The piece of money was enough to pay for Peter as well as for his Lord. Thus did our Lord submit to be treated as one who had forfeited life, and must have a half-shekel paid as redemption-money for him. This he has done for our sake, and in association with us; and we are redeemed by his act, and in union with him: for he said of the piece of money, “That take, and go unto them for me and thee.” There were not two half-shekels, but one piece of money, paid for Jesus and Peter: thus we see that his people are joined with him in the one redemption.

“He bore on the tree the sentence for me, And now both the Surety and sinner are free.”

The obvious moral lesson is, — Pay rather than cause offense.

But far greater and deeper truths lie slumbering down below. They are such as these: the glorious freedom of the Son, his coming under tribute for our sakes, and the clearance of himself and us by the one payment which he himself provided.

Matthew 18

1. *At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*

He spoke of his abasement, they thought of their own advancement; and that “at the same time.” How different at the same moment the Teacher and the disciples! The idea of greatness, and of more or less of it for each one, was interwoven with their notion of a kingdom, even though it might be “the kingdom of heaven.” They came unto Jesus; but how could they have the hardihood to ask their lowly Lord a question so manifestly alien to his thought and spirit? It showed their trustfulness, but also displayed their folly.

2. *And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them.*

He did not answer them with words alone, but made his teaching more impressive by an act. He “called a little child unto him.” The child came at once, and Jesus “set him in the midst of them.” That the child came at his call, and was willingly placed where Jesus wished, a evidence of a sweetness of manner on the part of our Lord. Surely there was a smile on his face when he bade the little one come unto him; and there must have been a charming gentleness in the manner in which he placed the child in the center of the twelve, as his little model. Let us see Jesus and the little child, and the twelve apostles grouped around the two central figures. Thus may the whole church gather to study Jesus, and the childlike character.

3. *And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

The apostles were converted in one sense, but even they needed a further conversion. They needed to be converted from self-seeking to humbleness and content. A little child has no ambitious dreams; he is satisfied with little things; he trusts; he aims not at greatness; he yields to command. There is no entering into the kingdom of heaven but by descending from fancied greatness to real lowliness of mind, and becoming as little children. To rise to the greatness of grace, we must go down to the littleness, the simplicity, and the trustfulness of childhood. Since this was the rule for apostles, we may depend upon it we cannot enter the kingdom in any less humbling manner. This truth is verified by our Lord's solemnly attesting word, "Verily I say unto you."

4. *Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

In the kingdom of heaven the least is the greatest. The most humble is the most exalted. He that will fulfill the lowest offices for the brethren shall be highest in their esteem. We have need to use endeavors to make ourselves truly lowly in mind; and if, through almighty grace, we succeed in it, we shall take high degrees in the school of love. What a kingdom is this, in which every man ascends by willingly going down!

It is wisdom for a man to humble himself, for thus he will escape the necessity of being humbled. Children do not try to be humble, but they are so; and the same is the case with really gracious persons. The imitation of humility is sickening; the reality is attractive. May grace work it in us!

5. *And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.*

It is no small thing to be able to appreciate humble and lowly characters. To receive one childlike believer in Christ's name is to receive Christ. To delight in a lowly, trustful character is to delight in Christ. If we count it a joy to do service to such persons, we may be sure that we are therein serving our Lord. Those who receive little ones in Christ's name will grow like them, and so in another way will receive Christ into their own souls.

6. *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*

To bless a little one is to entertain the Savior himself. To set one's self to pervert the simple, or to molest the humble, will be the sure way to a tremble doom.

Little ones which believe in Jesus are specially under his guardian care, and only the desperately malicious will attack them, or seek to make them stumble. Such an evil person will gain nothing, even should he win the easy victory he looks for: he will, on the contrary, be preparing for himself a terrible retribution. It were better for him that the biggest of milestone, such as would be used in a mill worked by an ass, were hanged about his neck, and that he, himself, were then hurled overboard, and drowned in the depth of the sea. He will surely, sink infamously, sink never to rise again. The haters of the humble are among the worst of men, for their enmity is unprovoked. They may hope to rise by oppressing or duping the simple-hearted; but such conduct will prove their certain destruction sooner or later. It is the lowly Lord of the lowly who pronounces this condemnation; and he is soon to be the Judge of quick and dead.

7. *Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!*

It is a sad world because of stumbling-block. This is the great misery of every age. Occasions for falling into sin are terribly many; and from the formation of society it seems as if it must be so. "It must needs be that offenses come." While man is man, his surroundings will be trying, and his fellow-men will too often become occasions of evil to him. This brings woe unto the world; but the center of that woe will be with the guilty cause of the stumbling, be that stumbling what it may. Those who try to be the greatest are great causers of offenses: the humble are the least likely to make others stumble. Woe, therefore, is the sure heritage of the proud; for he is that man by whom the offense cometh.

8, 9. *Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into*

everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Here our Lord repeats a passage from the Sermon on the Mount. (Chapter 5:29, 30.) Why should he not? Great lessons need to be often taught; especially lessons which involve painful self-denial. It is well when at the close of a man's ministry he can preach the same sermon as at the beginning. Some in these days change continually; Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

Temptations and incitements to sin are so dangerous that, if we find them in ourselves, we must at any cost be rid of the causes of them. If escape from these temptations should cause us to be like men who are halt or maimed, or have only one eye, the loss will be of small consequence so long as we enter into life. Better to miss culture through a rigid Puritanism, than to gain all the polish and accomplishments of the age at the expense of our spiritual health. Though at our entrance into the divine life we should seem to have been largely losers by renouncing habits or possessions which we felt bound to quit, yet we shall be real gainers. Our main concern should be to enter into life; and if this should coat us skill of hand, nimbleness of foot, and refinement of vision, as it may, we must cheerfully deny ourselves that we may possess eternal life. To remain in sin and retain all our advantages and capacities will be an awful loss when we are cast into hell fire, which is the sure portion of all who persevere in sinning. A lame, maimed, half-blinded saint is, even on earth, better than a sinner with every faculty fully developed. It is not necessary that hand, or foot, or eye should make us stumble; but if they do, the surgical process is short, sharp, decisive — Cut them off; and cast them from thee, or, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. The half-educated, timid, simple-minded believer, who, to escape the snares of false science, worldly cunning, and courtly pride, has cut himself off from what men call "advantages", will, in the end, prove to have been far wiser than those who risk their souls for the sake of what worldlings imagine to be necessary to human perfecting. The man who believes God, and so is set down as losing his critical eye, is a wiser person than he who by double acumen doubts himself into hell. Two hands, two feet, and two eyes will be of small advantage if cast into everlasting fire. Let the reader note that the terrible terms here employed are not the creation of the dark dreams of mediaeval times, but are the words of the loving Jesus.

10, 11. *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.*

The humble in heart, though judged to be fools among the ungodly, must not be so judged of by us. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones. We must see to it that we never look down on them with the pit, which is akin to contempt. They are very dear to God: they are cared for by angels, ay, by the presence angels who dwell near the eternal throne. Their angels are not in the rear rank, but in heaven do always behold the face of the Father. The highest courtiers of glory count it their honor to watch over the lowly in heart. Those who are servants to poor saints and little children are allowed free entrance to the King: what must he think of his little ones themselves?

Nay, this is not all. Jesus himself cares for the poorest and neediest. Yes, he came to save that which was lost. How dare we then be proud, and despise a child because of its youth, or a man because of his poverty, or his want of intelligence? The angels and the angels' Lord care for the most despised of our race; shall not we?

12. *How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountain, and seeketh that which is gone astray?*

We may not even think harshly of wandering ones. He who would not have us despise the little will not have us neglect the lost. Nay, the lost are to have special consideration. Is not the owner of a flock for the moment more concerned about the one astray, than the ninety and nine which are safe? The lost one is not better than any one of the others, but it is brought into prominence by its condition. It is not to the shepherd the object of deserved blame, much less of contempt; but his main thought is sympathy with its danger, and the fear that it may be destroyed before he can find it. To save it, he makes a mountain journey, in person, neglecting the large flock in comparison with his care of the one. This is good argument for despising none — not only of the least, but of the most erring. How think ye? Ye who yourselves were once astray, and have been restored by the Shepherd and Bishop of souls, how think ye?

13. *And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.*

In the shepherd's case we read, If so be that he find it; but our great Shepherd fails not, and is not discouraged. He brings back all the sheep that his Father gave him.

That sheep which, after wandering, is found, gives the shepherd more immediate joy than all the rest, just because it had caused him more present concern. Its rescue brought it to the front in his mind: he was forced to do more for it than for the ninety and nine, and therefore, estimating its value by what it has cost him, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. He is not vexed by his loss of time, nor angry because of his extra labor; but his joy is undiluted and overflowing. Evidently the Good Shepherd does not despise the little one because of its straying; for, having restored it, he allots it a chief place in his thoughts of joy; yea, he gets from it, though it be but one, more than from ninety and nine others of the best of his flock.

14. *Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*

We may ourselves complete the parallel as to the Shepherd of souls; it is too obvious to need the Savior to rehearse it.

In the words before us, our Lord further avers that our Father who is in heaven wills not that any one of these little ones should perish. Hence, we may not despise any of them; nor, indeed, despise any because of their being lowly, and of mean estate. Humble in their own estimate of themselves, and lightly esteemed among men, as the Lord's people often are, and surrounded by cruel foes, as is frequently the case, the heavenly Father wills not their destruction, nor can they be destroyed. We must not treat the poor, the obscure, the little-gifted, as though we thought they would be better out of our way, or as if they were of no consequence whatever, and could be most properly ignored. This is in a certain sense to make them perish; for those whom we regard as nothing become to us as if they were nothing. He who sits in the highest heavens seeks out those who are lowly in heart, and of a contrite spirit because of their wanderings, and he sets great store by them. Our Father in heaven will not have us despise those

who are precious in his eyes.

15. *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and sins alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*

So far from despising any, we are to seek their good, even when they have done us wrong. Here is a case of personal offense: we are to endeavor to make peace with our brother who has trespassed against us. The offended is to seek the offender. We must not let the trespass rankle in our bosom, by maintaining a sullen silence; nor may we go and publish the matter abroad. We must seek out the offender, and tell him his fault as if he were not aware of it; as perhaps he may not be. Let the remonstrance be between thee and him alone. It may happen that he will at once rectify the wrong; and then we have gained, not our suit, but something worth far more — our brother. We might have lost him: happily, a frank word has won him. God be praised!

16. *But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

If the brother has trespassed very badly, he will probably be sullen, or impertinent, and he will not hear thee. Do not, therefore, give him up; persevere in seeking peace. Give your own pleadings the support of companionship: sake with thee one or two more. Possibly the offender may notice what is said by the other brethren, although he may be prejudiced against you; or he may attach weight to united expostulation which he might not feel if the complaint came from one only. By calling in worthy arbitrators, you give the offender a fairer opportunity to set himself right. This time, let us hope, the brother will be won. But if not, you will have secured yourself against misrepresentation: that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word, may be established. It is by misquotation of words that quarrels are fomented; and it is a great thing to have the means of rectifying erroneous reports. Although it is a very unwise thing to interfere in quarrels, yet from this text it is clear that we should be willing to be one of the two or three who are to assist in settling a difference.

17. *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*

Men capable of injuring their fellows are often so hardened that they reject the kindest expostulation. If a brother acts in this way, shall we give him up? No, we must make a filial effort: Tell it unto the church. The whole assembly of the faithful must at last hear the case, and they must plead with him. He is to have an opportunity of hearing the judgment and advice of the whole brotherhood. Should this last attempt fail if he neglect to hear the church, he must be left as incorrigible. No pains and penalties are affixed. The brother is left to himself: he is regarded as being like the rest of the unbelieving world. This is the utmost stretch of our severity. He is one who needs converting, like the Gentiles outside; but towards even a heathen man and a publican we have kindly feelings; for we seek their salvation, and we seek that of the excommunicated brother in the same way. In all probability, the obstinate friend will ridicule the action of the community; and yet there is some possibility that he will be impressed thereby, and led to a better mind. At any rate, from the first personal visit of the injured brother down to the last act of disownment, nothing has been done vindictively, but all has been affectionately carried out, with the view of setting the brother right. The trespasser who will not be reconciled has incurred much guilt by resisting the attempts of love, made in obedience to the command of the great Head of the church.

18. *Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

Our Lord had inaugurated the church by handing its keys to Peter as representing the whole brotherhood; and now he distinctly recognizes those keys as being in the hands of the whole church. Verily I say unto you, “Whatsoever ye shall bind.” Those who bind are all the disciples, or the whole of the church which had been called in to make peace between the two brethren Each church has the keys of its own door. When those keys are rightly turned by the assembly below, the act is ratified above: that which they bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. If, by God’s grace, erring brethren repent, and are freed from the censure of the assembly, the Lord on high sanctions the deed, according to his word —

Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. This is to be understood with the limitation that it is really a church of Christ which acts, that it acts in his name, and rightly administers his laws. A deep solemnity surrounds the binding and loosing of true Christian assemblies. It is no light thing to act as a church, and no little thing to be put forth from it, or to be restored again to its fellowship. Our Lord made this clear by commencing with his authoritative preface — Verily I say unto you.

19. *Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*

Thus the Savior sets his seal upon assemblies of the faithful, even of the smallest kind, not only in their acts of discipline, but in their intercessions. Note how tenderly Jesus speaks of his followers: “If two of you.” Poor as you are, if two of you agree in prayer on earth, “my Father which is in heaven” will hearken to your pleading. Prayer should be matter for previous consideration, and persons about to join in prayer should “agree as touching anything that they shall ask.” Then they come together with an intelligent design, seeking a known blessing, and agreeing to combine their desires and their faith in reference to the one chosen object. Two believers united in holy desire and solemn prayer will have great power with God. Instead of despising the verdict of so small a gathering, we ought to respect it, since the Father does so.

Note the power of combined prayer. There is no excuse for giving up prayer-meetings while there are two praying people in the place; for two can prevail with God. Of course, more is needed than a cold agreement that certain things are desirable; there must be importunity and faith.

20. *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am 1 in the midst of them.*

The presence of Jesus is the fixed center of the assembly, the warrant for its coming together, and the power with which it acts. The church, however small, is gathered in his name. Jesus is there first: I am in the midst of them. We are gathered together by the holy impulses of Christian brotherhood, and our meeting is in the name of Jesus, and therefore there he is; near, not only to the

leader, or to the minister, but in the midst, and therefore near to each worshipper. We meet to do him honor, to hear his Word, to stir each other up to obey his will; and he is there to aid us. However small the number, we make a quorum; and what is done according to the laws of Christ is done with his authority. Hence it is that there is great power in united prayer from such persons: it is Jesus pleading in his saints. This should prevent Christian men from giving or taking offense; for if Jesus be in our midst, our peace must not be broken by strife.

21. *Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?*

Peter's question was opportune, giving a further opening for our Lord to enlarge upon the removal of offenses. Peter takes it for granted that he would forgive, and he only wishes to know how far he may carry this forgiveness. Doubtless he thought that he had given great latitude when he suggested till seven times. Probably he felt that he would need great grace to get so far as that in the patient endurance of his brother's sinning against him. It is true Peter did not go far enough; but do we go as far? Are not some professors very mindful of small grievances? Have many of us grace enough even for a sevenfold forgiveness?

22. *Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.*

Our Lord intends to teach us to forgive always and without end. He sets no limit. I say not unto thee, "until seven times." measured mercy is not according to the command. We may read the words of our Lord in this verse as seventy-seven times, or as seventy times seven, or four- hundred and-ninety times: there is no occasion to be very definite about numbers where an indefinite number is meant. We should make too small an account of offenses to occupy time in counting them, or in reckoning the number of times that we have overlooked them.

23. *Therefore is the kingdoms of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.*

The kingdom of heaven is again brought forward. We must not forget that this is the key of Matthew's Gospel. In all kingdoms there must be a king, a tribunal,

and a time for judgment of those under rule. The personal servants of a king must expect to give in a special account as to how they have used their lord's goods. Our Lord is that certain king, who would take account of his servants. Even if he called no one else to give an account, he would assuredly call his own servants to a settlement.

24. *And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.*

Ten thousand talents was an immense amount for a servant to owe his king. Some reckon that it was equivalent to two millions of our money. It was debt which could not be paid; overwhelming, and almost incalculable. This debt cropped up as soon as the king had begun to reckon: it was a matter of notoriety, too vast to be concealed. The debtor was brought bound before his lord, but his vast debt was his strongest bond ten thousand talents! Yet what is this amount to the burden of our obligations to God? O my soul, humble thyself as thou answerest the question, "How much owest thou?"

25. *But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.*

The debtor was penniless: he had not to pay. The creditor takes possession of the man: his lord commanded him to be sold. His wife, his children, and all that he had were to be sold also; but all put together, when payment was to be made, it came to nothing compared with the enormous debt. The sale of the man and his family was according to Oriental justice: the generous lord here described did not hesitate to exact it, and the debtor himself raised no question about the righteousness of the proceeding. Our Lord does not justify the act of the lord in the story: he simply uses the custom as a part of the scenery of his parable. We may be thankful that the spirit of Christianity has utterly abolished a law which made unoffending children suffer for their father's default, by the loss of their liberties. The servant was in a sad plight indeed when nothing remained his own, and even his own personality was sold away from him. He had not to pay; yet by royal order payment was to be made: he was wretched indeed.

26. *The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*

He could not pay, but he could humble himself before his lord. He fell down and worshipped him. He owned the debt, and begged for time "Have patience with me." Moreover; he gave a promise to discharge his obligations: "I will pay thee all." The promise was not worth the breath which spoke it. It is a very usual thing for men who can incur an enormous debt to make light of the payment, and fancy that a bill at three months is as good as gold. They dream that time is money, and that a promise is a payment. Many a poor sinner is very rich in resolutions. This servant- debtor thought he only needed patience; but indeed he needed forgiveness! It seems strange that he did not see this, since the debt was so great, and he had nothing wherewith to pay, but was utterly bankrupt: yet it is a well-known fact, that men do not see their true condition before the Lord God, even when they perceive that in many things they come short.

27. *Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.*

Humility and prayer prevailed; for the lord of that servant was such a king as the whole universe cannot rival for pity and grace. The debtor received far more than he dared to ask; for the measure of the gracious deed was not his own sense of need, nor even his own prayers, but the compassion of his lord. The heart of the great creditor was touched, and his whole being was moved with pity. The penniless debtor was unbound, and his debt was forgiven him: his lord loosed him, and forgave him. We know what this means. This was kindness indeed! There could be no greater thing done for the debtor; and all was so free, so noble, so perfect, that it ought to have produced a great effect upon him, and have led him in his measure, to imitate the royal example. Hard was the heart which such a fire of love could not soften.

28. *But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.*

The same servant, but how different his bearing! Just now he was a lowly

suppliant, but now he is a hectoring tyrant. He went out from the presence of his gracious lord, scarcely waiting to express his gratitude. He found one of his fellowservants; not his servant, nor his inferior, but one who was his equal, and his companion in service. This man owed him an hundred pence: a mere trifle when compared with the enormous debt which had been forgiven. We expect that he will at once wipe out that little score; but no: he laid hands on him, violently seizing him, for fear he should get away for a time. He took him by the throat, and bullied him with peremptory demands. He would have no patience with his debtor; he would not let him breathe if he did not pay. The debt was very very small, but the claim was urged with intense ferocity. Our little claims against our fellow-men are too apt to be pressed upon them with unsparing severity. The claimant had not even patience for an hour, but throttled his fellow-servant with the rough demand, “Pay me that thou owest,” What right had he to be choking his lord’s servant? He was injuring one who belonged to his own king. Our fellow-servant is our Lord’s servant, and not ours to bully and oppress as we please.

29. *And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*

It ought to have startled the tyrant when he heard his own prayer addressed to himself. It was word for word what he had said; and the suppliant’s posture was just what his own had been when before his lord: he fell down at his feet. That poor promise, too, “I will pay thee all,” was repeated in his ear, and with much more likelihood of its being fulfilled. Surely he would give the same answer as his lord had granted him! Not he: he was servile, and of an evil spirit; his lord was a king, and acted royally.

30. *And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.*

Not he could not, but he would not. He gave no time, proposed no composition, promised no mercy, He used the law of his own generous king as a means of treading down his poor fellow-servant. He personally attended to the debtor’s arrest: he went and cast him into prison. He sees him sentenced to a debtor’s dungeon, without hope of coming out again unless by payment. It was his lord’s own prison, too: he was making use of his generous sovereign’s lock-up to

gratify his own malevolence. He vowed that his fellow-servant should lie there till he should, pay the debt. Base conduct this! As common as it is base!

31. *So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.*

Others could see the evil of his conduct if he could not. His fellowservants saw what was done: he was a notable character, and what he did was sure to be observed. Much had been forgiven him, and much was expected from him. His fellowservants were very sorry for the imprisoned debtor, and sorry that any fellow-servant of theirs should degrade himself by acting in a manner so opposite to the treatment which he had received from his lord. They were right in reporting the transaction to head- quarters; for such a foul offense ought to be known where right could be done. Instead of carrying out lynch law, they told unto their lord all that was done. This was a very sensible course of conduct on their part. Let us adopt this plan if we are ever in similar circumstances, instead of indulging in foolish gossip and angry denunciation.

32, 33. *Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?*

The wretch was not condemned unheard: his lord only judged him after that he had called him. His lord and king set the matter before him very clearly, and appealed to his own judgment upon the case. He reminded him of what he appeared to have forgotten: at least, he had acted as if it had never happened. His lord addressed him in words of burning indignation: “O thou wicked servant.” It was atrocious wickedness of heart which had permitted him to indulge in such unworthy conduct. “I forgave thee all that debt.” What an all it was! How freely was the debt removed! “I forgave thee.” The reason given was, “because thou desiredst me.” Not because thou hadst deserved such leniency, or couldst ever repay it. The inference from such abounding generosity was clear, strong unanswerable. The last words of the verse are forcible in the highest degree: “Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant” How readily should we forgive the little offenses from which we suffer, since our Lord

has pardoned our grievous transgressions! No offense of a fellow-servant can be compared with our sins against our Lord. What a model for our compassion is set before us in those words, “even as I had pity on thee”!

The culprit made no defense. What could he say? He was unable even to make another appeal to mercy. He had refused mercy, and now mercy refused him.

34. *And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.*

His lord was wroth: he who could be so compassionate was necessarily a man of warm feelings, and therefore he could be angry. Naturally, he was compassionate towards the poor debtor in prison, and this made him indignant with the wretch who had imprisoned him. It was righteous wrath which gave up the unforgiving servant to tremble punishment: delivered him to the tormentors, the proper executioners of justice. His punishment would be without end, for it was to last till he should pay all that was due; and the debtor could never pay the ten thousand talents. Things must take their course with malicious spirits. They have put themselves beyond the reach of mercy. Love’s own greatness necessitates great indignation at the malice which insists upon revenging its little wrongs. The sovereignty of God is never unjust: he only delivers to the tormentors those whom the law of the universe necessarily condemns.

35. *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

This is the great moral lesson. We incur greater wrath by refusing to forgive than by all the rest of our indebtedness. W e cannot escape from condemnation if we refuse to pardon others. If we forgive in words only, but not from our hearts, we remain under the same condemnation. Continued anger against our brother shuts heaven’s gate in our own faces. The heavenly Father of the Lord Jesus will be righteously wrathful against us, and will deliver us to the tormentors if we do not from our hearts forgive every one his brother’s trespasses.

Lord, make me of a meek, forgiving spirit! May my heart be as ready to pardon offenses as it is to beat!

Matthew 19

1. *And it came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan; and great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.*

He had finished these sayings upon forgiveness, and so he hastened to other work which was not finished. He was ever on the move, and he departed from Galilee, which had received so much of his care, that other regions might enjoy his ministry. He now turned more to the south, into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan, and he did good at every turn. when he had finished speaking to the disciples, he began working deeds of grace in a new district, and great multitudes followed him. Ever the crowd was at his heels, held both by his word and by his work. He was drawing near to Jerusalem, and his foes were on the watch; but he did not restrain his works of mercy because of their jealous scrutiny: he healed, them THERE. The place of our Lord's gracious work is worthy to be remembered. Where the need was, there the help was given.

3. *The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him. Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?*

Here are these vipers again! What perseverance in malice! Little cared they for instruction, yet they assumed the air of enquirers. In truth, they were upon the catch, and were ready to dispute with him whatever he might say. The question is cunningly worded "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" The looser the terms of a question, the more likely is it to entangle the person interrogated. Their own consciences might have told them that the marriage bond is not to be severed for any and every reason that a man likes to mention. Yet it was a question much disputed at the time, whether a man could send away his wife at pleasure, or whether there must be some serious reason alleged. Whatever Jesus might say, the Pharisees meant to use his verdict against

him.

4-6. *And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh. Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

In his reply, Jesus challenges their knowledge of the law: “Have ye not read?” It was a forcible mode of appealing to their own boasted acquaintance with the books of Moses. Our Lord honors Holy Scripture by drawing his argument therefrom. He chose specially to set his seal upon a part of the story of creation — that story which modern critics speak of as if it were fable or myth. He took his hearers back to the beginning when God made them male and female, and made them sons. “In the image of God created he him; male and female created he them “(Genesis 1:27). The woman was taken out of man, and Adam truly said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). By marriage this unity is set forth and embodied under divine sanction. This oneness is of the most real and vital kind: “They are no more twain, but one flesh.” All other ties are feeble compared with this: even father and mother must stand second to the wife: “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and, shall cleave to his wife.” Being divinely appointed, this union must not be broken by the caprice of men: “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Our Lord thus decides for the life-long perpetuity of the marriage bond, in opposition to those who allowed divorce for “every cause”, which very frequently meant for no cause whatever,

7. *They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?*

Every reader of the passage in the books of Moses which is here referred to will be struck with the Pharisees’ unfair rendering of it. In Deuteronomy 24:1, 2, we read: “When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her

out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife." Moses commanded nothing in this instance; but barely tolerated, and greatly limited a custom then in vogue. To set Moses against Moses is not a new device; but the Pharisees would hardly venture to set Moses against God, and make him command an alteration of a divine law ordained from the beginning; yet our Lord made them see that they would have to do this to maintain the theory of easy divorce. The fact is, that Moses found divorce in existence to an almost unlimited extort, and he wisely commenced its overthrow by curtailing the custom rather than by absolutely forbidding it at once. They were not allowed to send away a wife with a hasty word, but must make a deliberate, solemn ceremonial of it by preparing and giving a writing of divorcement; and this was only allowed in a special case: "because he hath found some uncleanness in her." Although many of the Pharisees spirited away this last limitation, and considered that the enactment in Deuteronomy sanctioned almost unlimited divorce, they were not unanimous in the matter, and were perpetually disputing over it. Hence there were many ways in which our Lord's decision could be turned against him, whatever it might be.

8. *He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.*

Moses tolerated and circumscribed an evil custom which he knew that such a people would not relinquish after its having been established among them for so long a time. They could not bear a higher law, and so he treated them as persons diseased with hardness of heart, hoping to lead them back to an older and better state of things by possible stages. As impurity ceased, and as the spirit of true religion would influence the nation, the need for divorce, and even the least desire for it, would die out. There was no provision in paradise for Adam's putting away Eve; there was no desire for divorce in the golden age. The enactment of the Mosaic law of divorce was modern and temporary; and in the form into which a loose interpretation of Scripture had distorted it, it was not defensible.

9. *And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*

Fornication makes the guilty person a fit subject for just and lawful divorce; for it is a virtual disannulling of the marriage bond. In a case of fornication, upon clear proof, the tie can be loosed; but in no other case. Any other sort of divorce is by the law of God null and void, and it involves the persons who act upon it in the crime of adultery. Whoso marrieth her who is put away doth commit adultery; since she is not really divorced, but remains the wife of her former husband. Our King tolerates none of those enactments which, in certain countries, trifle with the bonds of matrimony. Nations may make what laws they dare, but they cannot alter facts: persons once married are, in the sight of God, married for life, with the one exception of proven fornication.

10. *His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry.*

They had come to look upon the ease of slipping the marriage-knot as a sort of relief; and on marriage itself, without the power of escaping from it by divorce, as an evil thing, or at least as very likely to prove so. Better not marry if you marry for life: this seemed to be their notion. Even his disciples, looking at the risks of unhappy married life, concluded that it were better to remain single. They said, “It is good not to marry;” and there was a measure of truth in their declaration.

11. *But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.*

It may be better in some respects not to marry; but all men cannot receive this saying, and put it into practice: it would be the end of the race if they could. A single life is not for all, nor for many: nature forbids. To some, celibacy is better than marriage; but such are peculiar in constitution, or in circumstances. Abstinence from marriage is to a few a choice gift, answering high purposes; but to the many, marriage is as necessary as it is honorable.

12. *For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it,*

let him receive it.

Some have but feeble desires concerning marriage, and they were so born. They will find it good to remain as they are. Others subdue the desires of nature, for holy and laudable reasons, for the kingdom of heaven's sake; but this is not for all, nor for many. It is optional with individuals to marry or not: if they marry, nature commends, but grace is silent; if they forbear for Christ's sake, grace commends, and nature does not forbid. Enforced celibacy is the seed-bed of sins. "Marriage is honorable in all" Violations of purity are abominable in the sight of the Lord. In this matter we need guidance and grace if we follow the usual way; and if we elect the less frequented road, we shall need grace and guidance even more. As to a resolve to persevere in a single life: He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.

13. *Then there were brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them.*

From questions of marriage to the subject of children was an easy and natural step, and providence so arranged events that our Lord was led to proceed from the one to the other.

We see how gentle was our King in the fact that anyone thought of bringing boys and girls to him. Their friends brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and bestow a blessing; and also lift up his hands to God, and pray for them. This was a very natural desire on the part of devout parents, and it showed much faith in our Lord's condescension. We feel sure that the mothers brought them, for still holy women are doing the same. The disciples, jealous for their Lord's honor, bade the mothers and nurses forbear. They judged that it was too childish an act on the mothers' part, and it was treating the great Teacher too familiarly. Were not the disciples the more childish of the two in imagining that their Lord would be unkind to babes?

14. *But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*

The Lord is more lowly than his servants. He bids them cease to hinder the little

children; he calls them to himself; he declares that they are the very kind of people of whom his heavenly kingdom is made up. “Of such is the kingdom of heaven” — this is the banner of the Sunday school. Children, and those like them, may freely come into the kingdom of the Lord of heaven; yea, these are the characters who alone can enter into that kingdom.

15. *And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.*

He did not baptize them, but he did bless them. The touch of his hands meant more than pen can write. Happy children who shared that laying on of hands; for those hands were neither empty nor feeble!

Jesus did not tarry even with this lovely company, but hastened on to his appointed work, and departed thence. Yet he had said so much in the two sentences of the former verse that earth and heaven will never cease to be the richer for them.

16. *And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?*

Here was one who thought himself first, yet he had to go last; yea, and even to go away sorrowful.

He was a self-sufficient gentleman: he seemed to feel that one good thing from him would be enough, and that he could and would do it at once. He had some misgivings, or he would not have asked the question, “What good thing shall I do?” Perhaps, even in so admirable a life as his own, something might yet be lacking. But if it should turn out to be so, he could readily supply the lack.

He was very respectful, and addressed the Lord Jesus as “Good Master.” So far, so good. His question was of great personal importance.

“What shall I do, that I may have eternal life” Oh, that more young men would ask a similar question! It was a very suitable enquiry for an earnest person, such as he undoubtedly was. He sought eternal life, and could not be content with the honors of the hour. He only wanted to know what to do to win that eternal life, and he would set about it at once.

This is a hopeful enquirer. Surely he will be a grand, convert! Let us wait a little, and we shall see.

17. *And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*

Our Lord cared not for empty compliments, and so he asks, “Why callest thou me good?” Many modern heretics praise Jesus, and their commendations are such an insult to his glorious person that he might well say, “Why callest thou me good? “Did this man really mean it? If so, the Lord Jesus would let him know by a hint that he to whom he spake was more than man. The argument is clear: either Jesus was good, or he ought not to have called him good; but as there is none good but God, Jesus who is good must be God.

As for the question of having eternal life through a good work, Jesus answers him on his own ground. Life by the law comes only by keeping its commands: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” No one has ever fulfilled them so as to be good: did this young man think that he could do so? Yet, on the ground of law, if he would deserve eternal life as a reward, he must be as good as God, and keep the commandments to perfection. Thus the rugged way of works was set before him; not that he might attempt to win eternal life thereby, but that he might perceive his own shortcomings, and so feel his weakness as to look for salvation by some other method.

18, 19. *He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*

The questioner ventures to ask, “Which?” Did he suppose that certain ceremonial precepts would be mentioned? Probably he did, for he felt himself quite sure upon all the points of the moral law. Our Lord, however, gives him nothing new, but turns to the ancient Decalogue. He quotes the second table of the law first, and begins with commands which would appear to the young man to be the mere commonplaces of morality. The last-quoted command

summarized the rest, and it ought to have opened the questioner's eyes to his short comings; for who has loved his neighbor as himself? The young aristocrat was not, however, convicted of sin. He pressed his enquiry as to salvation by works because he thought himself on the road to winning it.

20. *The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?*

Perhaps he spoke the truth, as he understood the law. He had maintained an excellent moral character from his early boyhood. He felt that in act and deed he had kept all those commands without a fault of any consequence. He was no braggart, but could honestly claim to have led a commendable life. He was, no doubt, a very exemplary person, and so amiable that Jesus looked on him very lovingly. We know some who are like him, and may be described "as touching the law, blameless." But he was not all he thought himself to be: he did not love his neighbor as himself, as he would soon be made to see. "What lack I yet?" is an enquiry few would dare to put. He felt that if there was anything lacking in him, he was altogether ignorant as to what it could be. His self esteem needed no increasing.

21. *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

Our Lord brings him to the test of the first table of the law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." If he did this, he would be willing, at a divine command, to part with his property, even as Abraham was ready to offer up his son. Our Lord Jesus, as God, claimed from him an unusual sacrifice. Did he love God sufficiently to make it? The command of our Lord was a challenge to self-righteousness to prove its own profession. We may also regard it as putting on its trial his profession to have loved his neighbor as himself. Did he love the poor as well as himself? If so, it would be no hardship to sell his possessions, and give to the poor. We must not infer that Jesus would have all his followers part with all that they have: it was a test for this one man: "If thou wilt be perfect." Still, if we love our possessions more than we love God, we are idolaters; and if we hug our property so as to let the poor hunger, we cannot be said to love them as ourselves. We have heard of persons claiming to be perfect, and yet retaining

possession of hundreds of thousands of pounds; and we have doubted their perfection. Was there not a cause? Compassion for poverty, zeal for the truth, and love of doing good, will hardly allow of any Christian's owning enormous riches. At any rate, such wealthy ones will find it hard to render an account at the last great day. We must love Jesus and his great cause better than our wealth, or else we are not his true followers. If our religion were ever put to the great test of fierce persecution, and we had to part with all our property, or part with Christ, hesitation would be fatal.

22. *But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.*

He could not go the whole length of his own plan. He would be saved by works; yet he would not carry out his works to the full of the law's demand. He failed to observe the spirit both of the second and the first table. He loved not his poor brother as himself; he loved not God in Christ Jesus with all his heart and soul. He thought himself first; but he soon stood behind the last, for he went away sorrowful. Thus the Savior tests character. That which glittered so much is not found to be gold. This man's great possessions, so possessed him that he never possessed his own soul.

23. *Then Jesus said unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Worldly possessions, apart from divine grace, have a deadening, hardening, hampering influence upon the soul. Some rich men do enter into the kingdom of heaven, but it is hard for them; very hard indeed. The temptation is to let riches rule the mind; and when that is the case, the kingdom of this world opposes the kingdom of heaven. Houses and land, and gold and silver, act as bird-lime to the soul, and prevent its rising towards heaven. This is especially the case in persecuting times; but it is sufficiently a fact in all periods of human history. It is worthy of notice that this hard sentence was intended for Christians; for it is written, Then Jesus said unto his disciples, "Verily I say UNTO YOU."

24. *And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.*

Weighty words are introduced with the authoritative formula, Again I say unto you. Into this statement our Lord throws the full weight of his personality. He uses an expressive proverb, which means precisely what the words convey to the common reader. There is no sense in hunting up abstruse metaphors where the proverbial teaching is as plain as possible. He would show that wealth is far more a hindrance than a help to those who would enter into the kingdom of God: in fact, such a hindrance as to render the matter practically impossible without divine interposition. A camel is not only large, but it has humps, and how can it go through so small an opening as the eye of a needle? It could not make such a passage except by a strange miracle; nor can a rich man enter into the kingdom of God except by a marvel of grace. How few of the rich even hear the gospel! They are too great, too fine, too busy, too proud to regard the lowly preacher of the gospel of the poor. If, perchance, they do hear the heavenly message, they have not the necessities and tribulations which drive men from the present world to seek consolation in the world to come, and so they feel no need to accept Christ. “Gold and the gospel seldom do agree.” Those who are rich in this world, in the vast majority of instances, scorn to become subjects of the kingdom in which faith is riches, and holiness is honor.

Should the rich begin the divine life, how hard it is for them to persevere amid the cares, the luxuries, the temptations of a wealthy position! The difficulties are enormous when we think of the pride of life, the flattery of rank, the danger of power, the risk of carnal security. Yet, blessed be God, we have seen rich men become poor in spirit! We have seen camels go through this needle’s eye, humps and all! We hope to see many more such miracles of almighty grace.

25. *When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?*

No common astonishment filled them Much astounding truth they had already heard from their Master; but this exceeded all, and they were exceedingly amazed. They had previously thought that wealth was an advantage: and now they judged that if those who had riches could only be saved with surpassing difficulty, poor working-men like themselves could have no hope whatever. They were ready to despair; and therefore they put to their Lord the very natural question, “Who then can be saved?” Even our Lord’s disciples felt themselves bewildered by his plain utterance, so hard is it to get rid of prejudices in favor of wealth.

26. *But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*

Jesus beheld them. He looked on them with pity and with love, and told them that God could do that which, apart from him, would never come to pass. To enter the kingdom is impossible to man unaided: one sin or another blocks the way. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are a sadly effective barrier to the soul when it attempts to enter the city of holiness; but God can cause those barriers to yield, and enable the soul to enter by the narrow way. He is mighty to save. With God all things, are possible. What a joyful truth for the writer and the reader! Our salvation, when we view our own weakness and the power of sin, is impossible with men. Only when we turn to God and his grace, does salvation range among the possibilities.

The rich man is set by our Lord, not at the head, but at the foot of the line of aspirants for the kingdom.

Lord, my hope of being found in thy kingdom lies in thy power, and grace, and not in my possessions!

27. *Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?*

Here is another claimant for a front place. Peter answered, adding, as he seemed to think, a question needful for the full discussion of the subject. Peter speaks for his brethren: “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee,” we have done what the rich young man refused to do: “What shall we have therefore?” He spoke as the representative of a number who had become poor for the kingdom’s sake: surely these must have a large reward. Little as these first believers had to leave, it was their all, and they had forsaken it to follow Jesus: Peter would fain hear what their recompense would be what Peter said was true, but it was not wisely spoken. It has a selfish, grasping look, and it is worded so barely that it ought not in that fashion to have come from a servant to his Lord. After all, what have any of us to lose for Jesus compared with what we gain by him? “What shall we have?” is a question which we need not raise, for we ought rather to think of what we have already received at our Lord’s hands. Himself is reward enough to the soul that hath him.

28. *And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Our Lord regards Peter as spokesman for them all, and he therefore answered them all: "Jesus said unto them." Seeing their questioning state of mind, he begins with, "Verily I say unto you." He condescendingly meets their somewhat selfish enquiry. They needed not to doubt but what there would be a large and full reward for those who had followed him. His first adherents would have high rank, and should sit as assessors with the great Judge in the day of his exaltation. Those who share his humiliation shall share his glory also.

When our Lord shall sit in the throne of his glory, all things will have been made new. That dispensation will be called the regeneration: then shall the highest honors among their fellows of the twelve tribes of Israel await the twelve who followed Jesus, even to the loss of all things.

29. *And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.*

No man shall be a loser by the Lord Jesus in the long run. Every one that hath bravely forsaken the comforts of this life for Christ shall receive an hundredfold recompense. Our Lord makes up to the persecuted all that which they part with for his sake. Exiles for the truth have found a father and a brother in every Christian; a mother and a sister in every holy woman. Our Lord, by giving us his own love, and the love of our fellow-Christians, supplies a hundredfold compensation to those who have to leave wife or children for his sake In being entertained hospitably by loving brethren, saints in banishment have had their houses and lands in a sense restored to them. To be at home everywhere, is a great gain, even though for Christ's name's sake we should be exiled from our native shores. Above all, in God we have a hundredfold recompense for all that we can possibly lose for his cause; and then there is the eternal life given to us, which no mansions and estates could have procured for us. In faith of this we look forward to the reign of the saints, when even here they shall inherit the earth, and rejoice themselves in the abundance of peace. Beyond this, when time

ceases, there remains endless bliss; for we shall inherit everlasting life. Oh, that we may never hesitate to be glad losers for Jesus! They who lose all for Christ will find all in Christ, and receive all with Christ.

30. *But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.*

Thus our Lord sums up his deliverance as to rich men, and gives us the aphorism now before us, which he has already illustrated, and means to repeat further on in the sixteenth verse of the next chapter. Our King is here seen arranging human positions as they appear from his throne. To his eye, many first are last, and many last are first; and he will in his kingdom place men according to the divine order.

Matthew 20

1. *For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.*

The kingdom of heaven, is all of grace, and so is the service connected with it. Let thin be remembered in the exposition of this parable. The call to work, the ability, and the reward, are all on the principle of grace, and not upon that of merit. This was no common man that is an householder, and his going out to hire laborers into his vineyards was not after the usual manner of men, for they will have a full day's work for a full day's wage. This householder considered the laborers rather than himself. He was up before the dew was gone from the grass, and found laborers, and sent them into his vineyard. It was a choice privilege to be allowed to begin holy service so early in the morning. They agreed with the householder, and went to work on his terms. They might well be content, since they were promised a full day's hire, and were sure to get it: a penny a day represented the usual and accepted wage. The householder and the laborers agreed upon the amount; and this is the point which has to be noted further on. Young believers have a blessed prospect: they may well be happy to do good work, in a good place, for good Master, and on good terms.

3, 4. *And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.*

Hating indolence, and grieving that he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, he hired more workers about the third hour. They would make only

three-quarters of a day; but it was for their good to cease from loafing at the street-corner. These are like persons whose childhood is past, but who are not yet old. They are favored to have a good part of their day of life available for hallowed service. To these the good householder said: “Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.” He pointed to those already in the field, and said, “Go ye also;” and he promised them, not a definite sum, as he did those whom he first hired, but he said: “Whatsoever is right I will give you.” They went their way to their labor, for they did not wish to remain idlers; and as right-minded men, they could not quarrel with the householder’s agreement to give them whatsoever was right. Oh, that those around us, she are in their rising manhood, would at once take up their tools, and begin to serve the great Lord!

5. *Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise.*

Had it been altogether and alone a business transaction, the householder would have waited to begin a new day, and would not have given a whole day’s wage for a fraction of a day’s work. The entire matter was alone of grace; and therefore, when half the day was gone, about the sixth hour, he called in laborers. Men of forty and fifty are bidden to enter the vineyard. Yes, and about the ninth hour men were engaged. At sixty, the Lord calls a number by his grace! It is wrong to assert that men are not saved after forty; we know to the contrary, and could mention instances.

God in the greatness of his love calls into his service men from whom the exuberance of useful vigor has departed; he accepts the waning hours of their day. He has work for the weak as well as for the strong. He allows none to labor for him without the reward of grace, even though they have spent their best days in sin. This is no encouragement to procrastination; but it should induce old sinners to seek the Lord at once.

6, 7. *And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.*

The day was nearly over: only a single hour remained; yet about the eleventh

hour he went out. The generous householder was willing to take on more workmen, and give them hire, though the sun was going down. He found a group lingering at the loafers' corner — standing idle. He wished to clear the whole town of sluggards, and so he said to them, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" His question to them may be read by making each word in its turn emphatic, and then it yields a fullness of meaning. Why are ye idle? What is the good of it? Why stand ye here idle where all are busy? Why all the day idle? Will not a shorter space suffice? Why ye idle? You have need to work, you are able to do it, and you should set about it at once. Why is any one of us remaining idle towards God? Has nothing yet had power to engage us to sacred service? Can we dare to say, "No man hath hired us"? Nearly seventy years of age, and yet unsaved! Let us bestir ourselves. It is time that we went, without delay, to kill the weeds and prune the vines, and do something for our Lord in his vineyard. What but rich grace could lead him to take on the eleven o'clock lingerers? Yet he invites them as earnestly as those who came in the morning, and he will as surely give them their reward.

8. *So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.*

Days soon end, and to all the laborers even was come. This was pay-time, and the lord of the vineyard did not forget his agreements with the laborers, nor tell them to wait for their wages. Our Lord will rob no man of his reward. The householder in the parable sees to everything personally. His is the hiring, and the order for the paying. Promptly he saith unto his steward, "Call the laborers, and give them their hire." We shall be called each one to receive our reward when our day is over.

Happy are we to have been already first called into the vineyard: thus the second call to receive the hire becomes a welcome one.

The lord of the vineyard, whoso transactions in hiring had been of no ordinary kind, was equally peculiar in the manner of payment. He chose to arrange it so that those who first came were last served; which is not often the manner of men. It was not a transaction of a mercenary sort, but a display of free favor; and so the great quality of sovereignty comes in as to the very order of payment — "beginning from the last unto the first." The Lord will take care that, in the

transactions of his grace, his sovereignty as well as his goodness shall be conspicuous.

9. *And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny.*

Our Lord's pay is not a hire of deservings, but a gift of bounty. He paid on the scale of grace, and not at the rate of merit. He commenced in superb style, and to those who began to work at the eleventh hour, he gave every man a penny: here was a full day's pay for one hour's work. Herein was displayed the boundless bounty of the lord of the vineyard. That some, who have served the Lord but a very brief time, have equaled and even excelled those who have been for many years believers, is clear, for many short but blessed lives attest it. Converted late in life, they have been singularly diligent, specially consecrated, and memorably holy, and thus they have obtained the full result of grace at a speedy rate. God will place in heavenly glory those who turn to Christ even at the last. Did not our Lord say even to the dying thief, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise"? To what better place could any venerable saint have been taken? Oh, the riches of the grace of God!

10. *But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny.*

Possibly the first felt their vanity wounded by being paid after the others. They used their waiting time in considering their own superiority to the late-comers. Filled with legal principles, they kicked at the sovereignty of grace, and virtually in this matter rebelled against justice also. Those who are not friends to any one attribute of God are not in love with the others. Sooner or later, those who rage at sovereignty resist justice also. They had what was promised them: what more would they have a fair wage was given: they received every man a penny. What more could they expect? But they supposed — there was the difficulty: they had a theory to support, a supposition to justify; and so they were aggrieved because their supposition did not develop into a fact. God will not be bound by our supposings; and we do but deceive ourselves if we think he will.

11, 12. *And when they had received it, they murmured against the*

goodman of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

As soon as the penny was in their hand, a murmur was in their mouth. It was a fair wage, and what they agreed to take; but yet, when they had received, it, they murmured against the goodman of the house. His only supposable fault was that, as a good man, he was too good to the short-timers. The Lord does often greatly bless men whose working lives are short, and even those who are saved late in life. He does not measure up work as we do, by the rod, or by the hour. He has his own gracious ways of estimating service, and the reckonings of grace are not like those of law.

At the sight of great grace envious hearts grow sour. The murmurers said, not that the generous Lord had lowered them, but that he had advanced others who had wrought but one hour. Their complaint was, "Thou hast made them equal unto us." In this he had used his own money as he pleased, even as God dispenses grace as he wills. He is never unjust to any; but in gifts of bounty he will not be bound by our ideas of equity. Had they been of the right sort, they would have rejoiced that they had been able to give to him a fair day's work, since they had borne the burden and heat of the day.

At any rate, it is a great privilege to be serving the Lord throughout a long life, and those who have enjoyed this high favor are deeply indebted to the grace of God. Blessed be our heavenly Father, some of us have been his servants from our youth, and have endured no little labor for his name's sake; but in this we rejoice greatly, and magnify his love.

13. *But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny?*

He did not fall into a dispute with the whole company; but he answered one of them, which was quite enough. They had been individually hired, and individually he argues with them. It is a calm and reasonable reply: "Friend, I do thee no wrong." If the Lord rewards us graciously for what we do, we are not wronged because another who has done less has a like recompense. The quiet personal question is one to which there is no answer: "Didst not thou agree with

me for a penny?" Yet the legal spirit will come in even concerning work which is all of grace. Even among the Father's true sons, the elder brother gets touched with this alien spirit. None of us are quite free from it: it seems bred in the bone of our proud nature, yet nothing is more unlovely or unreasonable.

14, 15. *Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?*

The good man stands to his determination of bounty. He will not be driven from liberality by envious tongues. What he gives is his own, and he maintains his right to do as he pleases with it. This is a fine illustration of the sovereignty of divine grace. Each man shall have all he can claim. "Take that thine is;" and having it, let him rest content: "Go thy way." The Lord will not be ruled by our regulations, but declares, "I will give unto this last, even as unto thee." It is condescending on his part to say a word in defense of his most fit and fair position: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will saith my own?" If mercy be the Lord's own, he may give it as he pleases; and if the reward of service be wholly of grace, the Lord may render it according to his own pleasure. Be ye sure that he will do so. In words of thunder he says, both under the law and under the gospel, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

That was a home question for each of the grumblers to answer, — Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" Does it make you jealous to see others enjoy my bounty? Because I am good to these who deserved so little, does this deprive you of the good which I have granted to you?

Let us never envy late converts their joy or their usefulness; but applaud the sovereignty which blesses them so largely. We share the mercy with them; let us give them an equal portion of our Joy.

16. *So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen.*

Here our :Lord repeats his famous saying, which we noted in chapter 19. verse 30, and lets us know that precedence in the kingdom of heaven is according to

the order of grace. The King will rule in his own courts; and who shall question his will? As he is King, it is his right to rule. Loyal subjects are ever ready to support their sovereign. Our King reigns by right divine, and cannot do wrong. It was said of David, “Whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.” Let this be true of David’s Son and his people. Jesus tells us that, while many men are called to service, few reach the standard of choice men. Some of the last shall be first, for abounding grace is seen in their brief hour of work; but some of the first shall be last, for they are not always diligent throughout their longer day, and so fall back in the race, or their legal notions put them far behind those who were called later in life, but who are better instructed in the principles of divine grace.

17-19. *And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again.*

Marching up, towards the guilty capital, with resolute and vigorous step, Jesus outwalked the trembling disciples, who forsaw some dire tragedy would transpire. They went with him, and that was something; and showed that, if timid, they were sincere. His words were true and significant: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem.” He thought it wise to tell them yet again of the dark future which was now drawing very near, so he took the twelve disciples apart in the way. That is the best communion when Jesus himself takes us apart. He knows the fittest seasons for fullest revelations. Possibly, in this, his human soul was seeking fellowship; but how little of it he found among his feeble followers! Lord, when thou cost take me apart, prepare me for full communion, lest I miss a golden opportunity!

The heart of Jesus was full of his sacrifice. Mark how he dwells on the details from the beginning to the end of his sufferings, death, and resurrection. He uses very much the same terms as when they abode in Galilee. We noticed that statement while reading in chapter 17:22, and this is very like a repetition of it. It was a subject too grave to be set forth with variety of expressions. He calls their attention to the fact that they were going up to Jerusalem, the place of sacrifice: the journey of his utmost grief was now beginning: the end was hastening on.

What a pang shot through his heart as he said, “The Son of man shall be betrayed”! This he said in the hearing of the disciple who would act as the traitor: did no compunction visit his base heart? The twelve knew that Jesus had no more cruel foes than “the chief priests and scribes”, the men of the Sanhedrim: these, by a mock trial, would “condemn him to death”, but as they could not carry out the sentence themselves, they would “deliver him to the Gentiles.” How accurately the Lord traces the line of action! He omits none of the shameful details. He says that they would deliver him to the Romans, “to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him.” Here were three sharp swords: one scarcely knows which had the keenest edge Our hearts ought to melt as we think of this threefold sorrow: scorn, cruelty, death. Our blessed Master, however, added a word which overpowered the bitterness of the death - draught. Here was the bright lining of the black cloud: “The third day he shall rise again.” This poured a flood of light on what else had been a sevenfold midnight.

Did our Lord thus dwell on his passion, and should not we? Yes, it should be our life-long theme. They say, in this hour of defection: “Think of his life rather than of his death; “but we are not to be duped by them. “We preach Christ crucified.” “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

20, 21. *Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.*

While the mind of Jesus was occupied with his humiliation and death, his followers were thinking of their own honor and ease. Alas, poor human nature! The mother of Zebedee’s children only spoke as others felt. She, with a mother’s love, sought eminence, and even pre-eminence, for her sons; but the fact that the other disciples were displeased showed that they were ambitious also. Doubtless, they wanted to fill the positions, that the mother of James and John craved for them. She approached the Savior reverently, worshipping him. Yet there was too much familiarity in her request to be granted an unnamed thing: desiring a certain thing of him.

Our Lord here sets us the example of never promising in the dark. He said unto

her, “What wilt thou?” Know what you promise before you promise. Great was this woman’s faith in the Lord’s ultimate victory and occasion to the throne, since she regards his enthronement as so certain, that she prays that her two sons should sit in his courts on his right and left hand. Was she aware of what our Lord had told his disciples? We half think so, for the words are,—Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children. If she knew and understood all that wont before, she was willing that her sons should share the lot of Jesus, both as to his cross and his crown; and this sets her petition in a bright light. Still, there was a good deal of a mother’s partiality in the request. See how she speaks of “these my two sons” with a touch of pride in her action. How grandly she describes the desired situation — “may sit the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom”! She had evidently very courtly notions of what the kingdom would ultimately become. In any case, her request had in it much of trust, and much of loyal union to Christ, though somewhat. also of self. We need not censure her; but we may question ourselves as to whether we think as much of our Lord as she did.

22. *But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.*

The petition of the mother was that of the sons also; for Jesus answered and said, “Ye know not what ye ask.” As from the mother, the request was probably of better quality than as from the sons; for our Lord speaks to them rather than to her. They had asked, through the mother, but they may have asked in greater ignorance than she; and had they known what their request included, they might never have presented it. At any rate, our Lord treats the petition as theirs rather than their mother’s; and as it was about themselves, he questions them as to how far they were prepared for the consequences. To be near to the throne of the King would involve fellowship with him in the suffering and self-sacrifice by which he set up his spiritual kingdom: were they ready for this? Had they strength to endure to the end? “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They say unto him, “we are able.” Perhaps this was too hasty an answer; and yet it may under the aspect have been the best they could give. If they were looking alone to their Lord for strength, they were, through his grace, quite able to bear anything. But, when they thought of his throne, had they remembered the cup, and the baptism, without which there would be no enjoying the kingdom?

23. *And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.*

Hearing their professed willingness to have fellowship with himself in all things, our Lord assures them that he does not refuse to be associated with them; but he points them to the immediate and certain result of that fellowship. Our practical present business is not to aim at eminence in the kingdom, but submissively to drink the cup of suffering, and plunge into the deeps of humiliation which our Lord appoints for us. It is a great honor to be allowed to drink of his cup and to be baptized with his baptism: this he grants to his believing disciples. This fellowship is the essence of the spiritual kingdom. If our cup be bitter, it is his cup; if our baptism be overwhelming, it is the baptism that he is baptized with; and this sweetens the one, and prevents the other from being a death-plunge. Indeed that the cup and the baptism are his, makes our share in them to be an honor bestowed by grace.

Other rewards of the kingdom are not arbitrarily granted, but fittingly bestowed. Jesus says that the high places in the kingdom will be given to them for whom they are prepared of his Father. He has no hesitation in speaking of what his Father has “prepared.” Everything about our Lord’s Kingdom is divinely arranged and fixed; nothing is left to chance or fate.

Even Jesus will not interfere with the divine appointment concerning his kingdom. As a friend, he may not be solicited to use a supposed private influence to alter the arrangements of infinite wisdom. Eternal purposes are not to be changed at the request of ill-advised disciples. In a sense, Jesus gives all things; but as Mediator, he comes not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him, and so he correctly says of rank in his kingdom, It is not mine to give. How thoroughly did our Lord take a lowly place for our sakes! In this laying aside of authority, he gives a silent rebuke to our self-seeking. It may be that he intended to reprove, not only the mother of Zebedee’s children, but all the disciples, who were constantly seeking great things for themselves.

24-26. *And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye*

know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.

Naturally, the other ten apostles did not relish the attempt of the sons of Zebedee to steal a march upon them. We never hear that they resented our Lord's preference of Peter, James, and John; but when two of these sought precedence for themselves they could not bear it. Peter was with them in this, for we read, When the ten heard it. Unanimously they were angry with upstarts. That they were moved with indignation, was a proof that they were ambitious themselves, or at least that they were not willing to take the lowest place. Because they were guilty of the same fault, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

Here was a sad division in the little camp; how could it be healed? Jesus called them unto him: he personally dealt with this rising evil, and bade the twelve come aside, and listen to something meant only for their private ear. They were confounding his kingdom with the ordinary government of men, and therefore they dreamed of being great, and exercising dominion in his name; but he wished them to correct their ideas, and turn their thoughts another way. It was true, that to be his followers was a highly honorable thing, and made them partakers of a kingdom; but it was not like earthly kingdoms. In the great Gentile monarchies, princes ruled by authority force, and pomp; but in his kingdom the rule would be one of love, and the dignity would be that of service. He who could serve most would be the greatest. The lowliest would be the most honored: the most self-sacrificing would have most power. Whenever we see the nobles of earth contending for precedence, we should hear our Master say, "But it shall not be so among you." We must for ever quit hunting after honor, office, power, and influence. If we aim at greatness at all, it must be by being great in service, becoming the minister or servant of our brethren.

27. *And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:*

To rise in Christ's kingdom we must descend. He who would be chief, or first, among saints, must be their servant, bondsman, or slave. The lower we have stooped, the higher we have risen In this kind of rivalry we shall be allowed to

excel without exciting the indignation of the brethren.

28. *Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

Assuredly HE who is greatest and chief among us has set us the example of the utmost love-service. No servants waited on him. He was Master and Lord; but he washed his servants' feet. He came not to be served, but to serve. He received nothing from others; his was a life of giving, and the giving of a life. For this purpose he was the Son of man; with this design he came; to this end he gave his life a ransom for many. No service is greater than to redeem sinners by his own death, no ministry is lowlier than to die in the stead of sinners.

29, 30. *And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.*

On Jericho a curse had rested; but the presence of Jesus brought it a blessing. We suppose he must needs go through Jericho as once before he must needs go through Samaria. Our Lord departed from Jericho, and a vast crowd attended him; for his fame had spread far and wide. Nothing striking is noted concerning his doings till two beggars come upon the scene. Mercy needs misery to give it an occasion to work. Behold, two blind men sitting by the way side. They could not behold Jesus, but we are asked to behold them. They had taken up a hopeful position by the way side, for there they would be likely to hear any good news, and there they would be seen by the compassionate. They had ears if they had not eyes, and they used their hearing well. On enquiry, they learned that Jesus passed by, and believing that he could restore their sight, they grew earnest in prayer to him: they cried out. Their plea was pity: "save mercy on us." Their appeal was to the royal heart of Jesus: "O Lord, thou son of Israel." Our Lord's sermon was interrupted by the repeated outcries of these two blind beggars of Jericho; but this never displeased him; neither would true preachers of the gospel be disconcerted if some of their hearers were to cry out with similar eagerness for salvation.

31. *And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David.*

The crowd desired to hear Jesus, but could not do so because of the shouts of the blind men: therefore his multitude rebuked them. Did they upbraid them for ill manners, or for noise, or for harshness of tone, or for selfishly wishing to monopolize Jesus? It is always easy to find a stick when you wish to beat a dog. The people wanted them to be quiet, and hold their peace, and found plenty of arguments why they should do so. This was all very well for those who were in possession of their faculties; but men who have lost their sight cannot be quieted if there is an opportunity of obtaining sight; and as that opportunity was rapidly passing away from these poor men, they became vehement in their earnestness. Unhindered by the threats of the crowd, they cried the more. Some men are urged onward by all attempts to pull them back. When we are seeking the Lord, we shall be wise to make every hindrance into a stimulus. We may well bear rebukes and rebuffs when our great aim is to obtain mercy from Jesus.

Unvarying was the blind beggars' cry: "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David" Variety of words they had no time to study. Having asked for what they needed, in words which leaped from their hearts, they repeated their prayer and their plea, and it was no vain repetition.

32. *And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you?*

Jesus stood still. At the voice of prayer, the Sun of righteousness paused in his progress. Believing cries can hold the Son of God by the feet. He called them: and this because they had called him. What comfort that call yielded them! We are not told that they came to him: there is no need to tell us that. They were at his feet as soon as the words were uttered. How sadly blind are those who, being called a thousand times by the voice of mercy, yet refuse to come!

Our Lord enlightened minds as well as eyes, and so he would have the blind men intelligently feel and express their needs. He puts to them the personal enquiry: "What will ye that I shall do unto you?" It was not a hard question, yet it is one which many an attendant at our places of worship would find it difficult to

answer. You say you “wish to be saved”: what do you mean by those words?

33. *They say unto him, lord, that our eyes may be opened.*

Just so. They needed no time for second thoughts. Oh, that our people were as quick to pray, “Lord, that our eyes may be opened”! They went straight to the point. There is not a word to spare in their explanatory prayer. No book was wanted, no form of words; the desire clothed itself in simple, natural, earnest speech.

34. *So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.*

So, that is, since they thus stated their desire, and had so great a need, Jesus had compassion on them, pitying their loneliness in the dark, their deprivation of enjoyment, their loss of power to follow a handicraft, and their consequent poverty. He touched their eyes. What hands were those which undertook such lowly fellowship with human flesh, and wrought such deeds of power! Immediately their eyes received sight. Only a touch, and light entered. Time is not necessary to the cures of Jesus. Proof of their sight was at once forthcoming, for they followed him. We best use our spiritual sight when we look to Jesus, and keep close to his heel.

Oh, that the reader, if he be spiritually blind, may ask for the touch of Jesus, and receive it at once, for immediately he will receive sight! An inward light will in an instant shine forth upon the soul, and the spiritual world will become apparent to the enlightened mind. The Son of David still lives, and still opens the eyes of the blind. He still hears the humble prayer of those who know their blindness and their poverty. If the reader fears that he, too, is spiritually blind, let him cry unto the Lord at this very instant, and he will see what he shall see, and he will for ever bless the hand which gave sight to the eyes of his soul.

Matthew 21

1. *And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.*

The time was come for our Lord to finish his great work on earth, and his going up to Jerusalem was with this intent. He now determines to enter his capital city openly, and there to reveal himself as King. To this end, when he came near to the city, Jesus sent two disciples to bring him the foal of an ass whereon he should ride. His orders to the two disciples whom he come to Bethphage, are worthy of our serious attention. He directed them to the place where they should find the animal: “Go into the village over against you.” The Lord knows where that which he requires is to be found. Perhaps it is nearer to us than we dream: “over against out” He told them that they would not have to search: “straightway ye shall find.” When the Lord sends us on an errand, he will speed us on our way. He described the condition of the creatures: “an ass tied, and a colt with her.” Our Lord knows the position of every animal in the world, and he counts no circumstance to be beneath his office.

Nor did he leave the disciples without orders how they were to proceed: “loose them, and bring them.” Demur and debate there would be none; they might act at once. To stand questioning is not for the messengers of our King: it is their duty to obey their Lord’s orders, and to fear nothing. The two animals would be willingly yielded up by their owner when the disciples said, “The Lord hath need of them;” nay, he would not only give them up, but “straightway he will send them.” Either the owner was himself a secret disciple, or some awe of the Lord Jesus was on his mind; but he would right joyfully consent to lend the ass and its

foal for the purpose for which they were required.

What a singular conjunction of words is here, “the Lord” and “hath need”! Jesus, without laying aside his sovereignty, had taken a nature full of needs; yet, being in need, he was still the Lord, and could command his subjects, and requisition their property. Whenever we have anything of which the Lord’s cause has need, how cheerfully should we hand it over to him! The owner of the ass and her colt regarded it as an honor to furnish Jesus with a creature to ride upon. How great is the power of Jesus over human minds, so that by a word he quietly moves them to do his bidding!

We have here the record of two disciples being sent to fetch an ass: those who do little things for Jesus are honored thereby. Their errand appeared strange, for what they did might seem like robbery; but he who sent them took care to protect them from the least shade of suspicion. The messengers raised no question, offered no objection, and met with no difficulty. It is ours to do what Jesus bids us, just as he bids us, and because he bids us; for his command is our authority.

4, 5.. *All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*

Matthew is always reminding us of the Old Testament; as well, indeed, he may, for our Lord is always fulfilling it. Every point of detail is according to prophetic model: All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet. The Old and New Testaments dovetail into each other. Men have written “Harmonies of the Gospels”; but God has given us a Harmony of the Old and New Testament. The passage referred to is in Zechariah 9:9. It represents Zion’s King as meek and lowly even in the hour of his triumphant entrance into his metropolis, riding, not upon a war-horse, but upon a young ass, whereon no man had sat. He had before said of himself, “I am meek and lowly in heart,” and now he gives one more proof of the truth of his own words; and, at the same time, of the fulfillment of prophecy: “Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an ass.” He did not, like Solomon, fetch horses out of Egypt to minister to his pride; but he who was greater than Solomon was content with a colt the foal of an ass, and even that humble

creature was borrowed, for he had none of his own. The tenderness of Jesus comes out in the fact of his having the ass brought with her foal that they might not be parted. He was, as a King, all gentleness and mercy: his grandeur involved no pain, even for the meanest living thing. How blessed is it for us to be ruled by such a King!

6, 7. *And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.*

This should be an accurate description of the conduct of all Christians: The disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them. They did not question or criticize their King's commands; they obeyed them, which was much better. What a church should we see on earth if this were universally true! They carried out their King's bidding in every detail.

The disciples also brought the ass and the colt; in no way deviating from the orders which they had received. They added actions which naturally grew out of their King's orders. There must be fit caparison for the steeds which are to be employed for such a royal procession, so they put on them their clothes. This was done of their own accord. Many are ready to fetch other men's asses, but slow to lend their own clothes; these disciples were willing and eager to bear their share in the triumphal procession of the Lord Jesus. From first to last there was no forced contribution or mercenary service; all was most voluntary: the ass and foal were cheerfully lent, and the garments were spontaneously placed thereon. All was simple and natural, full of truth and heartiness. How different from the artificial ceremonials of ordinary monarchs!

They set him thereon. When men previously had tried to take Jesus by force, to make him a king in earthly fashion, he withdrew himself from them; but the hour for his public entry into Jerusalem had arrived, and he therefore allowed his disciples to set him upon the lowly beast that was to carry him into the city. Gladly they put the Lord in the place of honor, and joyfully they walked at his side.

8. *And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.*

The people were so numerous that they are described as a very great multitude. Unusual unanimity prevailed amongst the populace: they all gathered to Jesus. The patriarch Jacob had foretold, concerning the Shiloh, “unto him shall the gathering of the people be.” This was fulfilled many times during the Savior’s earthly ministry; and it is still continually being fulfilled.

The crowd was in a state of great excitement, and came marching along with Jesus in high enthusiasm. Carpeting the road, they spread, their garments in the way; and as if this were not enough, others cut down branches from the trees, and, strawed them in the way. Our first parents, in their shame, made clothes of the leaves of trees; but now both clothes and leaves are at the feet of man’s Redeemer. John says that the people “took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him.” The long feathery fronds of the palms would be suitable either for waving in the air, or casting upon the ground before the King. The common people, in the simplest but most effective manner, prepared a royal welcome for the Son of David. What an unusual sight! They were on the tiptoe of expectation, looking for a kingly Deliverer, and they vaguely hoped that “Jesus the prophet of Nazareth” might prove to be the Promised One. He had excited their wonder, raised their hopes, and earned their reverence. For the time they held him in high honor. Do we wonder at it when we think how he had healed their sick, and had fed them by thousands when they fainted?

9. *And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.*

Numbers still flocked together till there was not only a multitude, but multitudes, some that went before, and others that followed. The crowds preceding and following the Lord were of one mind concerning him, and, indeed, they seemed to have but one voice. Scarcely knowing what they did, probably dreaming of an earthly kingdom, they lifted up one and the same loyal shout of “Hosanna to the son of David:

Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.” They quoted an ancient Psalm (118), and applied it to Jesus; and in every way expressed their delight and expectation. Alas! how soon this gleam of sunlight gave place to black darkness. The day of palms was closely followed by the day of crucifixion. Thus fickle are the sons of men. “Vox populi” is anything but

“Vox Dei.”

10. *And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?*

He had been there before, but not on this wise. Never had such enthusiastic multitudes surrounded him with acclamations. Quiet citizens, who had not quitted their homes, wondered at the crowd. Great numbers had been moved by some uncontrollable impulse to go out to meet Jesus, and, when he was come into Jerusalem, still greater crowds were attracted, all the city was moved. There is nothing that can “move” mankind like the coming of Christ. Everyone enquired, “Who is this?” It may have been in some an idle curiosity, and in others a fleeting interest; but it was far better than the dull indifference which cares for none of these things. Where Jesus comes he makes a stir, and raises enquiry. “Who is this?” is a proper, profitable, personal, pressing question. Let our reader make this enquiry concerning Jesus, and never rest till he knows the answer.

11. *And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*

Everyone who had entered the city in the royal procession was prepared to inform enquiring citizens The multitude said; that is to say, the answer was unanimous: “This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.” The answer was true, but not all the, truth. Seldom is a multitude so well informed as in this instance. Christ’s name, his office, his early abode, and his lowly race are all indicated. Those who wished to know more about him had in the answer of the multitude the keys of all that it was needful for them to discover. Oh, that our teeming populations knew as much of Jesus as the multitudes of Jerusalem knew! And yet it may be that, if they did, they might act as basely as did these sinners of Jerusalem, when their Hosannas were so soon changed into cruel cries of “Away with him! Crucify him!”

12, 13. *And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seat, of them, that sold doves, And said unto*

them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

Jesus went into the temple of God again, as he did at the beginning of his ministry. Then the reforming Prophet intimated what was needed, and now the King proceeds to carry it out. A temple dedicated to God must not become a place of merchandise and robbery. Jesus.. cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple. The sellers were the more permanently obstructive, the more constantly offensive, so they were driven out first: but as there would have been no sellers if these had not been buyers, they must be cast out also. Those who kept the tables of the moneychangers might have pleaded that they were there for the public convenience, since they supplied shekels and other moneys of the sanctuary in lieu of Roman coin. The seats of them that sold doves seemed licensed, since they dealt in a young pigeons and turtle doves for the sacrifices. But these traders were not in this serving God, but making profit for themselves, and therefore our Lord overthrew all their arrangements, and cleared the holy place.

What an awe must have surrounded this one Man, that the whole tribe of traffickers should flee before him while the, endured the overturning of their tables and their seats! Neither the temple guard, nor the Roman soldiers appear to have interfered in any way. When Jesus takes to himself power, opposition ceases. What a prophecy this incident affords of the sense with which, in his Second Advent, he will purge his floor with the fan in his hand!

Our Lord, while he drives out the profaners of the temple, vindicates his holy violence by saying, “It is written.” Whether he was contending with the arch-enemy, or with wicked men, he used but one weapon, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” In this, as in everything else, let us follow his example. Isaiah had penned those words (Isaiah 56:7), “Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.” This prophecy had a special relation to the Court of the Gentiles, which was being so grossly desecrated by these dealers. Our Savior likened his :Father’s house, when occupied by these buyers and sellers, to those caves in the mountains where robbers were wont to lurk in his day: “Ye have made it a den of thieves.” The words spoken by the King were strong, but not more so than the case before him required. It is a king’s business to break up the hiding-places of bandits, and Jesus did so. He could not bear to see his Father’s house of prayer made into a haunt of robbers.

14. *And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.*

The coming into the temple of blind mendicants and limping beggars was no defilement to the holy place. The blind and the lame came to him: to whom else should they come? Was he not the good Physician? They come to him in the temple: where else should they come? Was it not the house of mercy? Jesus, in his Father's name, welcomed the motley band, and healed them. Some people seem to think that, if the very poor come into places of worship, they are out of place; but this is the vain notion of a wicked pride. The poorest and the most sinful may come to Jesus. We, too, came into the assembly of the saints at one time, spiritually blind and lame; but Jesus opened our eyes, and healed us of our lameness. If he sees anything amiss with us now, we are sure he will not drive us away from his courts, but he will heal us at once. Let all the blind and lame come to him now.

15, 16. *And when the chief priest, and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying Hosanna to the son of David; they were sore displeased, And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?*

Chief priests and scribes are ever on the watch: nothing that glorifies the Lord Jesus will escape their eyes. Expect no less in these days: if the gospel prevails, formalists will be enraged. Praise rendered to Jesus was gall and wormwood to the ecclesiastics whose abuses he rebuked. His doings in the temple, which were self-evidently right, they dared not attack; but they were none the less full of wrath because of the wonderful things that he did. More and more they nursed their indignation. At last the enthusiastic shouts of the children crying in the temple, and saying, "Hosanna to the son of David," gave them an occasion to vent their contempt. How could a real prophet allow boys and girls to be shouting, at his heels at that rate? Yet their contempt was only assumed: in truth they feared Jesus, and dreaded the effect of the popular enthusiasm, and so they were sore displeased. As soon as they can find an opportunity, they will spit their venom upon the Lord.

They boldly speak to Jesus about this rabblement of juveniles. They said unto him, “Hearest thou what these say?” They salute thee as if thou wert a king. These silly children cry to thee, ‘Hosanna.’ Why cost thou allow them to say it? Bid the youngsters cease their boisterous noise. How canst thou as a man bear with such childish cries? “Our Savior’s answer was complete. In answer to their question, “Hearest thou what these say?” Jesus saith unto them, “Yea; have ye never read?” Ye chief priests and scribes, have ye not read your own Psalter, of which ye profess to be such diligent students? If ye have read it, remember the words of David in Psalm 8:2, “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise.” Our Lord gives the sense of the passage rather than the exact words. God’s praise is perfected out of children’s mouths. In them his glory is seen, and frequently by them it is declared. When others are silent, these shall speak out, and in their simple truthfulness they shall give forth the praise of the Lord more fully than grown-up men and women will.

17. *And he left them, and went out of the city into Bethany; and he lodged there.*

Jesus loved not quibbling priests. He left them. He gave them a Scriptural answer to their enquiry, and then, knowing that further argument with them was useless, he left them. A wise example for us to follow. He desired quiet, and so he went out of the city. He loved the villages, and therefore he turned aside from the busy haunts of men, and entered into Bethany. In that place there lived a well-beloved family, always charmed to entertain him; and he lodged there. There he was at home, for he loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus. A day of excitement was followed by an evening of retirement in a country home. He spent the night of that most eventful day with his faithful friends. What a contrast between his entry into Jerusalem and his visit to his friends at Bethany! Lord, lodge with me! Make my house thine abode!

18. *Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.*

He hungered. Wonderful words! The Lord of heaven hungered! We cannot imagine that his kind hosts had neglected to provide for him; probably he was so absorbed in thought that he forgot to eat bread. It may be that, according to his wont, in the morning, he had risen while all others in the house were still sleeping, that he might hold communion in private with his Father, and receive

from heaven strength for the work that lay before him. At least, this was no unusual thing with him. He returned into the city; he shirked not the work which he had yet to do; but this time the King came hungering to his capital. He was about to begin a long day's work without breaking his fast; yet his hand had fed thousands at one time. Surely all heaven and earth will be eager to wait upon his need.

19. *And when he saw a fig tree, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.*

Looking for food, a fig tree in full leaf promised him a little refreshment. This fig tree was, apparently, no one's property; it stood in the way, it was growing in the public highway, all by itself. Its position was conspicuous. and its appearance striking, so that he saw it at once. It was not the time for figs; but the fig tree has this peculiarity, that the fruit comes before the leaves; if, therefore, we see leaves fully developed, we naturally look for figs fit to be eaten. This tree had put forth leaves out of season, when other fig trees were bare, and had not begun to put forth their early figs. It, so to speak, outran its fellows; but its premature growth was all deception. Our Lord, when he came to it, found nothing thereon, but leaves only. It had overleaped the needful first stage of putting forth green figs, and had rushed into a fruitless verdure. It was great at wood and leaf, but worthless for fruit. In this it sadly resembled Jerusalem, which was verdant with religious pretense, and forward with a vain enthusiasm; but it was destitute of repentance, faith, and holiness, which are far more important than pious formalities. The Lord Jesus used this green, but barren, and disappointing, tree as an object-lesson. He came to it as he came to the Jews; he found nothing but leaves; he condemned it to perpetual fruitlessness: "Let so fruit grow on thee henceforward forever;" and he left it under a sentence which was right speedily executed, even as Jerusalem would soon be destroyed.

And presently the fig tree withered away. This has been styled the one miracle of judgment wrought by our Lord; but surely that which is done to a tree cannot be called vindictive. To fell a whole forest has never been considered cruel, and to use a single barren tree as an object-lesson, can only seem unkind to those who are sentimental and idiotic. It was kindness to the ages to use a worthless tree to teach a salutary lessons.

20. *And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!*

The Lord's word was so very quickly fulfilled, that the disciples wondered. We marvel that they marveled. By this time they should have grown accustomed to deeds of power, and to the rapidity with which they were performed. Even to this day some doubt a work if it is speedy, and thus imitate the cry, "How soon is the fig tree withered away!" Whatever the Lord does, he does perfectly, completely. The fig tree was "presently" destroyed.

21. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt, not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.*

To the first disciples the power of absolutely working miracles was given by our Lord, and given in connection with a simple, unwavering confidence: "If ye have faith, and doubt not." God may not work miracles for us, but he will do all that we need in accordance with our faith; doing it in a way of providence, according to the spirit of the present dispensation. But here also the faith that we exercise in him must be free from doubt.

Before a living faith, barren systems of religion will wither away; and by the power of undoubting confidence in God, mountains of difficulty shall be removed, and cast into the sea. Have we ever spoken in Christ's name to barren fig trees and obstructing mountains, bidding them depart out of our way? If not, where is our faith? If we have faith and doubt not, we shall know the truth of this promise: it shall be done. Apart from the actual possession of unwavering faith, the words of our Lord will seem fabulous.

22. *And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.*

This gives us a grand cheque-book on the Bank of Faith, which we may use without stint. How wide are the terms: "all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing"! If we are enabled to pray the prayer of faith, we shall gain the

blessing, be it whatever it may. This is not possible concerning things unpromised, or things not according to the divine will. Believing prayer is the shadow of the coming blessing. It is a gift from God, not a fancy of the human will, nor a freak of idle wishing. “Believing, ye shall receive;” but too often the believing is not there.

23. *And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching,, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?*

Jesus returned to his Father’s house, and there he was again met by his old antagonists. When he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him; they had rallied their forces, and taken time to recall their courage. They interfered with him as he was teaching, and demanded his authority for what he said and did. He had taken their breath away by his daring purgation of the temple, unarmed and unaided; and only after a night’s interval dared they question his right to act as he had done. Now they put him to the question: “By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?” That he did marvelous things was admitted; but in what official capacity did he act, and who placed him in that office? This was carrying the war home: they struck out fiercely at their assailant. They hoped to wound him in this point, and to overcome him. Poor fools! They were not worthy of an answer from him.

24. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, such if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things.*

Yes, Jesus answered. His answers are always complete, but seldom what his foes expect. The quibblers of our day need not be in too great a hurry to call their statements unanswerable: Jesus will answer for himself in due time. He says to these chief priests and elders, “I also will ask you one thing.” Their question was met by another question, even as the rods of the Egyptian magicians, when turned into serpents, were met by Aaron’s rod, which, as a serpent, swallowed up their rods. Frequently it will be wisdom not to reply to the quibblings of the

enemies of the gospel, but to pose them with some mystery too deep for them.

Our Lord's conditions were fair and reasonable: "If ye tell me, I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things." Apparently, the questioners raised no objection, for Jesus at once stated his question to them.

25-27. *The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.*

The question our Lord put to the chief priests and elders was simple enough had they been honest men; but as they had a game to play, they could not reply without great difficulty.

Men-pleasers are obliged to be politicians, and see which way the land lies. Our Lord put his questioners on the horns of a dilemma. If John the Baptist was sent from heaven, why had they rejected him? That John was of men, they dared not assert; for their fear of the people silenced them. They were in a corner, and saw no way of escape, and therefore they pleaded ignorance: They answered Jesus, and said, "We cannot tell." Which answer was no answer from them, but supplied him with a just and crushing reply to them: "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." They could have told Jesus whence John's baptism was, but they would not; and he could have told them all about his divine authority, but he knew that no useful end would be answered, and therefore he declined to stay more. It is a solemn thing when love itself grows weary, and refuses further conversation. Our Lord's tone to these questioners is that of one who is dealing with hopeless creatures, who deserve no quarter, since they would make no use of leniency. They could not be won by gentleness; they must be shaken off exposed, and dethroned from the seat of power, before the eyes of those who had been misled by them.

28, 29. *But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered*

and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.

By two parables the Lord Jesus deals with the religious leaders who had opposed him.

In the first parable, that of the two sons, he exposes their fair but false dealings with God. “A certain man had two sons.” Both were bound to serve upon the family estate, and ought to have felt it a pleasure to do so. The first son was willful and wayward, but he was truthful, outspoken, and above-board in all that he did. His father said to him, “Son, go work to day in my vineyard; “a command which contains the father’s claim, the son’s duty, the immediate character of that duty, and the sphere of it. The command was plain enough, and so was the reply: “He answered and said, I will not.” It was rude, rebellious, ungrateful, unfilial; but it was hasty; and when a little interval had elapsed, quiet reflection brought the wayward boy to a better mind. “Afterward He repented, and went.” This was true repentance, for it led to practical obedience. He did not offer a verbal apology, or make a promise of future good behavior; he did far better, for he went about his father’s business without more ado. Oh, that many, who have hitherto refused to obey the gospel, might now be changed in mind, hearken to the voice of God, and enter his service!

30. *And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not.*

The second was of milder mood, and blander manner. To him the father spoke as to the elder, and the reply was verbally all that he could desire: “I go, sir.” As if it were a matter of course, with exemplary politeness he bade his father consider that he was fully at his disposal. He assented and consented; he was orthodox and precise. He had an easy, natural religiousness, which strongly contrasted with the blunt ungodliness of his brother. But note those words: “and went not.” His fine phrases and fair promises were deceit and falsehood. He never went to the vineyard, much less lifted pruning-knife or spade. His father’s vineyard might go to ruin for aught he cared; yet all the while he was bowing and scraping, and promising what he never meant to perform.

31, 32. *Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus, saith unto them. Verily I say unto you, That the*

publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.

Jesus made the hypocritical ecclesiastics judges in a case which was indeed their own. He asked them, “Whether of them twain did the will of his father?” Only one reply was possible: They say unto him, “The first.” It was clear that the first son, despite his rough refusal when he first heard his father’s command, was after all the doer of the father’s will. Then Jesus pointed out that the publicans and the harlots were like the first son; while the chief priests and elders of the people, with all their pretty professions, were deceitful and disobedient like the second son. They had professed great reverence for the divine Word; but when it came by John, they did not repent that they might believe him.. Open sinners, who had seemed to refuse the voice of God, did actually believe him, and so, by heeding John’s ministry of righteousness, went into the kingdom of God before the more likely classes. What must these self-satisfied priests and elders have thought when they heard publicans and harlots placed before them? Gnashing a their teeth, they planned murder in their hearts.

33. *Hear another parable: there was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.*

In this parable a certain householder did all that could be done for his vineyard: it was well planted, and hedged round about, provided with a wine-press digged in the rock, and guarded by a tower built for the purpose. Even so the Jewish Church had been created, trained, guarded, and fully furnished by the Lord; “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant “(Isaiah 5:7). Everything was in good order for the production of fruit, so that the Lord was able to say, “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? “(Isaiah 5:4.)

The owner went into a far country and committed the estate to husbandmen who were to take care of it for him and yield to him a certain share of the produce as

the rent. Thus the great Lord of Israel left the nation under the care of priests, and kings, and men of learning, who should have cultivated this heritage of Jehovah for him, and yielded up to him the fruit of this choice vineyard. God for a while seemed gone from his chosen people, for miracles had ceased; but this should have made the scribes and priests the more watchful, even as good servants are the more awake to guard the estate of their master when he is away.

34. *And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.*

The householder waited till near the full time in which he could expect a return. The time of the fruit drew near; and as the husbandmen sent him none of the produce of the vineyard, he sent his servants to receive the fruits of it, and bring them to him. These servants, as the lord's representatives, ought to have been received with due honor; but they were not. The leaders of the Jewish nation for a long time rendered to the Lord no homage, love, or service. Prophets were sent of God to Israel, but their message was refused by the rulers of the people.

35. *And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.*

The husbandman, the persons in charge and authority, kings, priests, and teachers; these united in doing evil to the owner's servants. They were not themselves his "servants"; they deserved not so honorable a title. Beating, killing, and stoning, are put for various forms of maltreatment, which the Lord's prophets received at the hands of Israel's husbandmen, the religious rulers of the nation. Those to whom the vineyard was leased were traitors to the chief landlord, and did violence to his messengers; for in heart they desired to keep the vineyard to themselves.

36. *Again he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.*

The lord of the vineyard was patient, and gave them further opportunities to mend their ways: Again, he sent other servants. Failure to bring back the fruit was not the fault of the first messengers, for other servants were rejected even as

they had been. The householder was very anxious to win the husbandmen to a better state of mind, for he increased the number of his representatives, sending more than the first, trusting that the evil men would yield to repeated calls. No good came of this effort of kindness; for the badly-disposed husbandmen only continued their murderous cruelty: they did unto them likewise. It was evidently a bad case. The Jewish people would not hearken to the voices of the Lord's servants, and their rulers not them the example of persecuting the men whom God had sent to them.

37. *But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.*

The sending of his son was the householder's last resort. Luke represents him as saying, "What shall I do?" He might have resolved at once to punish the evil-doers; but his action proved that mercy had triumphed over wrath: Last of all he sent unto them his son. The sending of Jesus to Jerusalem was God's ultimatum. If he should be rejected, judgment must fall upon the guilty, city. It seemed impossible that his mission could fail. In sending his beloved Son, the Father seemed to say, "Surely, 'they will reverence my son.' Can they go the length of doing despite to the Heir of all things? Will not his own beauty and majesty overawe them? Heaven adores him; hell trembles at him; surely, they will reverence my Son."

38. *But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us hill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.*

Things turned not out as a loving heart might have hoped. Evil worked itself to its consummation. When the husbandmen saw the son; that is to say, as soon as the chief priests and Pharisees perceived that the true Messiah was come, they said among themselves what they dared not say openly. The very sight of the heir of all things fired them with malice. In their hearts they hated Jesus, because they knew that he really was the Messiah. They feared that he would dismiss them, and assume possession of his own inheritance, and therefore they would make an end of him: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him." Once get him out of the way, they hoped to keep the nation in their own hands, and use it for their own purposes: therefore they inwardly said, "Let us seize on his inheritance."

They knew that he was “the heir”, and that it was “his inheritance”; but their knowledge did not prevent them from seeking to snatch the vineyard away from its rightful owner. Our Lord pictured to the life what was passing in the minds of the proud ecclesiastics around him, and he did not hesitate to do this to their faces. No names were mentioned, but this was personal preaching of the best kind.

39. *And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.*

The Lord Jesus becomes prophetic, as by the parable he foretells the success of their malice. The husbandmen were hasty in carrying out their wicked plot. No sooner said than done. Three acts were in that drama, and they followed quickly upon each other. We will drop the figures, and unveil the facts. They caught him in the garden of Gethsemane; they cast him out in their Council in the hall of Caiaphas, and when he was led without the gate of Jerusalem; they slew him at Calvary; for theirs was the crime, though the :Romans did the deed. Thus the Heir was slain, but the murderers did not long retain the vineyard; swift justice overtook them.

40. *When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do to those husbandmen?*

Jesus puts the matter before them. Out of their own mouths shall the verdict proceed. There is a time when the lord of the vineyard cometh. To those chief priests that hour was drawing very near: the question for them to think of was, “What will he do unto those husbandmen?” As a class, the religious leaders of the Jews were guilty of the blood of a long line of prophets, and they were about to crown their long career of crime by the murder of the Son of God himself: in the destruction of Jerusalem the God of heaven visited them, and dealt out just punishment to them. The siege of the city and the massacre of the inhabitants was a terrible avenging of the innocent blood which the people and their rulers had shed.

41. *They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall*

render him the fruits in their seasons.

Their reply was probably made complete, and full of details, that they might hide their own shame by a parade of justice in a case which they would have men think was no concern of theirs. In very deed, they pronounced upon themselves the sentence of being wicked men, to be miserably destroyed, and to have their offices given to better men: “he will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen.” They could not or would not give an opinion as to the mission of John the Baptist; but it seems that they could form a judgment as to themselves. The j Lord’s vineyard passed over to other a husbandmen; and the apostles and the first preachers of the gospel were found faithful to their trust.

Just now there are many professed ministers of Christ who are quitting, the truth which he has committed to his stewards, as a sacred trust, and setting up a doctrine of their own. Oh, that the Lord may raise up a race of men “who shall render him the fruits in their seasons!” The hall-mark of a faithful minister is his giving to God all the glory of any work that he is enabled to do. That which does not magnify the Lord will not bless men.

42, 43. *Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and a given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*

Our Lord reminds them of David’s language in Psalm 118:22, 23. They were professedly the builders, and they had rejected him who was the chief corner-stone. Yet the Lord God had made the despised one to be the head of the corner. He was the most conspicuous and honored stone in Israel’s building. Against the will of scribe and priest this had been accomplished: for it was the Lord’s doing. They might rage, but holy minds adored, and said, “It is marvelous in our eyes.” The sufferings and glory of Christ are the wonder of the universe:” which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12). All that relates to him is marvelous in the eyes of his people.

The doom of the unfaithful religious builders was the result of their sin: “Therefore say I unto you.” They were to love the blessings of the gospel: “The

kingdom of God shall be arisen from you." All share in the honors and offices of that kingdom would be refused them. That loss would be aggravated by their seeing it "given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." What a warning is this to our own country! We, too, are seeing the sacrifice and deity of our Lord questioned, and his sacred Word assailed by those who should have been its advocates. Unless there is a speedy amendment, the Lord may take away the candlestick out of its place, and find another race which will prove more faithful to him and to his gospel than our own has been.

44. *And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

Those who stumble over Christ, the chief corner-stone of the Church, are injured: they suffer grievous bruising and breathing, but he remains unhurt. Opposition to Jesus is injury to ourselves. Those upon whom he falls in wrath are ground to powder; for the results of his anger are overwhelming, fatal, irretrievable. Oppose him, and you suffer but when he arises in his might, and opposes you, destruction has already come to you.

45. *And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them.*

They had tried to turn aside the point of his parables; but they had tried in vain: the likenesses were striking, the parallels were perfect, they could not help knowing that he spake of them. Such parables; so true, so cutting, so pertinent, how could they escape them, or endure them?

46. *But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for prophet.*

Since they could not answer him, they would apprehend him. Happily, the multitude thought too well of Jesus to allow of their laying hands on him, though they sought to do so. These great religionists were as cowardly as they were cruel: they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet.

They dared not tell the truth concerning John because they feared the people, and

that feat restrained their anger against John’s Lord. It was arranged, in the order of providence, that ecclesiastical malice should be held in check by popular feeling. This was an instance of the way in which full often the earth has helped the woman (Revelation 12:16), and the will of the masses has screened the servants of God from priestly cruelty. He who rules all things sets in motion a high order of politics in the affairs of men in reference to his church. At times, princes have saved men of God from priestly rancor, and anon the multitude has preserved them from aristocratic hate. One way or another, Jehovah knows how to preserve his son, and all those who are with him, until the hour comes when by their deaths they can glorify his name, and enter into glory themselves.

Matthew 22

1. *And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said.*

And Jesus answered, and spake unto them again. This was his reply to the hatred of the chief priests and Pharisees. He answered them by going on with his ministry. For them, and for the people also, he spoke again by parables. They came to him with quibbles; he replied by parables. In the previous chapter, we noticed that “they perceived that he spake of them.” This perception did not, however, lead them to repentance; but only increased their hatred against the Savior. Their partly concealed anger was all the greater because, through fear of the multitude, they could not yet lay hands on Jesus, and put him to death. They had willfully closed their eyes to the light, set it continued to shine upon them. If they would not receive it, perhaps some of the people, whom they had been misleading, might accept it; therefore once more the King would give them a parable concerning his kingdom, and concerning himself. This parable must be distinguished from the one recorded in Luke 14:16-24, which was spoken on another occasion, and with a different object. It would be worth while to compare the two parables, and to note their resemblances and their differences.

2. *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son.*

A certain king made a marriage for his son. Thus doth the King of glory celebrate the union of his Son with our humanity. The divine Son of God condescended to be united with our human nature, in order that he might redeem the beloved objects of his choice from the penalty due to their sins, and might enter into the nearest conceivable connection with them. The gospel is a glorious festival in honor of that wondrous marriage, by which God and man are made one. It was a grand event; and grandly did the King, propose to celebrate it by a

wedding feast of grace. The marriage and the marriage festivities were all arranged by the King; he took such delight in his only-begotten and well-beloved Son, that everything that was for his honor and joy afforded infinite satisfaction to the great Father's heart. In addition to the Son's equal glory with the Father as Creator, Preserver, and Provider, by his marriage he was to be crowned with fresh honors as Savior, Redeemer, and Mediator.

3. *And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.*

The set time had arrived, and the Jews, who, as a nation, were bidden to the wedding, were invited to come and partake of the royal bounty. They had been "bidden" long before by the prophets whom the King had continued to send to them; and now that the festive day had dawned, the King sent forth his servants to call then that were bidden to the wedding. This was in accordance with the Oriental custom of sending a second invitation to those who had favorably received the first. John the Baptist and our Lord's apostles and disciples plainly told the people that the long looked-for event was drawing near; indeed, the appointed hour had already struck, the set time to favor Zion had come, all that was needed was that the guests should come to the wedding.

The Jews were highly honored in being chosen out of all the nations of the earth to attend the wedding of the King's Son; but alas! they did not prize their privileges: they would not come. They were instructed, entreated, and warned, but all to no purpose: "they would not come." Our Lord was very near the end of his sojourn on earth, and he summed up all that he had seen of Israel's conduct towards himself in this short sentence, "they would not come." It is not said, "They could not come," but, "They would not come." Some for one reason, and some for another, and perhaps some without any reason at all; but, without exception, "they would not come." They thus manifested their disloyalty to the King, their disobedience to his command, their dislike to his Son, their distaste for the royal banquet, and their disregard for the messengers sent to them by the King.

Note, it was the King who made this wedding feast; therefore, to refuse to be present, when the invitation implied great honor to those who received it, was as distinct an insult as could well be perpetrated against both the King and his Son. If an ordinary person had invited them, they might have pleased themselves

about accepting the invitation; but a royal invitation is a command that will be disobeyed at the refuser's peril. Let this be remembered by those who are now refusing the invitation of the gospel.

4. *Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.*

The King was patient, and gave the disloyal people a further opportunity of coming to the wedding feast: Again, he sent forth other servants. He wished to make every allowance for those who had refused his invitation so that they might be left without excuse if they persisted in their refusal. Possibly there may have been something in the servants that repelled instead of attracting them; or they may not have put the King's message a the best possible form; perhaps the intimation was not given clearly enough; or, perchance, on thinking over the matter, those who "would not come" might regret their hasty decision, and long for another invitation to the feast.

So the King sent forth other servants; and, lest there should be any mistake about the message they were to deliver, he said to them, "Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlingsare killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage." Jesus here seemed to glance into the near future, and to foretell what would happen after his death. The apostles and the immediate disciples of our Lord went throughout the land, declaring the gospel in all its fullness, freeness, and readiness. At first they kept to the Jews, according to the King's word: "Tell them which are bidden." At Antioch, in Pisidia, Paul and Barnabas said to the Jews who contradicted and blasphemed, "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you." (Acts 13:46.) The apostles at first seem to have regarded their mission as restricted to the Jews; but they certainly did preach the gospel to them. They told them that, by the death of Jesus, the preparation of salvation for men was fully made, according to the King's words: "Behold, I have prepared my dinner." They preached a present salvation, and one which displayed the riches of divine grace: "My oxen and my fatlings are killed." Indeed, they proclaimed grace all-sufficient, meeting every want of the soul: "All things are ready." And then they uttered the King's proclamation: "Come unto the marriage." In his name they invited, urged, and even commanded the "bidden" ones to come. They began at Jerusalem, and called to the feast the favored seed of Abraham, whose honor it

was to be the first invited to the royal banquet.

5. *But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.*

The bulk of the Jewish race gave small heed to apostolic preaching: they made light of it, counted it of less importance than the worldly affairs in which their hearts were engrossed. In making light of the gospel, they really were making light of the great King himself, treading under foot the Son of God, and doing despite unto the Spirit of grace. The doctrine of the cross was a stumbling-block to them; the spiritual kingdom of the crucified Nazarene was despicable in their eyes: “they made light of it.”

And went their ways. They did not go in the way the King would have had them go; they despised his way, and went their own ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise. “His farm” and “his merchandise” are set up against the King’s dinner: “my oxen and my fatlings.” The rebel seemed to say, “Let the King do as he likes with his oxen and his fatlings; I am going to look after my farm, or to attend to my merchandise.” Carnal men love carnal things, and “make light of” spiritual blessings. Alas, that the seed of Abraham, the friend of God, should thus have become as earth-bound as those whom the Jews contemptuously called “sinners of the Gentiles”!

6. *And the remnant took his servants, and entreated. them spitefully, and slew them.*

The religious remnant among the Jews, who clung to external forms with a ferocious bigotry, rose against the first preachers of the gospel, and subjected them to cruel prosecutions. They cared nothing for the incarnation of Emmanuel, that mysterious marriage of Godhead and manhood; they cared nothing for the Lord God himself, but took his servants, and by scourging, stoning, slander, and imprisonment, entreated them spitefully. Their cruel conduct to the Lord’s servants proved that they were full of spite, malice, and anger. Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, was a type of the fanatical Pharisees and religious rulers who were, as he confessed to King Agrippa, “exceedingly mad” against Christ’s followers. In many cases, they not only spite fully entreated the King’s servants, but they even slew them. Stephen was the first martyr of the truth after his

Lord's crucifixion; but he was by no means the last. If "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church", the Holy Land was plentifully sown with it in the early days of Christianity. This was Israel's answer to the King, who bade the long-favored nation unite in doing honor to his well-beloved Son. The Jews said, in erect, "We defy the King; we will not have his Son to reign over us; and in proof of our rebellion against him we have slain his servants."

7. *But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.*

In these terrible words, the siege of Jerusalem, the massacre of the people, and the destruction of their capital are all described. "When the king heard thereof, he was wroth. The King had reached the utmost limit of his forbearance and long-suffering patience. "The cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath" overflowed when he heard how his servants had been maltreated and slain; and: he sent forth his armies. The Roman emperor thought that he was sending his armies against the Jews; but he was, unconsciously, working out the eternal purposes of the most High God, even as the kings of Assyria and Babylon had been, in the olden time, the instruments by which the Lord had punished his rebellious people (see Isaiah 10:5, Jeremiah 25:9).

The cruel executioners did their terrible work in the most thorough manner. Read Josephus, and see how the Romans destroyed: those murderers, and burned up their city. The words are remarkable in their awful force and accuracy. Only Omniscience could foresee and foretell so fully and faithfully the woes that were to befall the murderers and their city.

The divine retribution that fell upon Jerusalem ought to convey a solemn warning to us, in these days when so many are making light of the gospel in our highly - favored land. No nation ever yet refused the gospel without having some overwhelming judgment as the consequence of its daring criminality. France is to this day suffering the effects of the massacres of St. Bartholomew. If England should reject the truth of God, its light, as a nation, will be quenched in seas of blood. May God prevent such an awful calamity by His almighty grace!

8, 9. *Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the*

highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

Then: when the King was angry, even then he was gracious. In wrath he remembered mercy. Judgment is his strange work; but “he delighteth in mercy.” Then saith he to his servants: the King still had servants left, though his enemies were destroyed. Christian preachers remained when chief priests and Pharisees were extinct, and Jerusalem was in ruins. The royal Host gathered his servants together, and put before them the exact position of affairs: “The wedding is ready.” Gospel provision was made in abundance; there was no lack on the King’s part. His Son’s wedding must be celebrated by a feast; and a feast requires guests: “but they which were bidden were not worthy.” This is the last we hear of those who were bidden. Seeing that they judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, others must be called. Salvation is not a matter of worthiness, or none would be saved. These men were too proud, too self-sufficient, too high-minded to be worthy recipients of the King’s favor. They preferred their farms and their merchandise to doing honor to the King and his Son, for at heart they were traitors.

What was to be done? Should the wedding be canceled, and the provision for the feast be destroyed? Not so. The King said to his servants: “Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.” Glorious was the outburst of grace which bade the apostles turn to the Gentiles. Hitherto they had not been bidden; but when the Jews finally rejected the Messiah, he gave to his disciples their wider commission: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” In the parable, highwaymen, hedge-birds, travelers, tramps, and all sorts of people are mentioned; and thus is Jesus to be preached to men in every condition, but especially to those who are “out of the way.” It is not after the manner of men to invite to a wedding banquet those who stray in the highways; but Jesus was setting forth the glorious freeness of the gospel invitation: “as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.”

This indicates no limited call, no preaching to gracious character. Restrictions there rightly were at the first; but alter the death of Christ they were all removed. Even our Lord said, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel;” and when he first sent forth his twelve apostles, his command to them was, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not.” But the time had come for the universal proclamation of the gospel. After his resurrection, Jesus said to his disciples, “All power is given unto me in

heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations."

10. *So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.*

So those went out into the highways: they did as they were told. This was the disciples' warrant for doing what must at first have seemed very strange to them. They themselves belonged to the favored race which had been first bidden; but God's grace overcame their prejudices, and they "went out" among the heathen, proclaiming the marriage of the Son of God, and pressing men to come to the wedding feast. The servants went in different directions into the highways; — the word is in the plural, "the partings of the highways", the Revised Version renders it; — the cross- roads where most people might be expected to be gathered together. Wherever the people are, there should the preachers of the gospel go with their God-given message.

The King's servants were so earnest and diligent, and their Master's grace wrought so effectually through them, that their efforts were eminently successful. They gathered together all as many as they found. The message that had been despised by the Jews was welcomed by the Gentiles; and from the great heathen highways of the world, — Rome, Athens, Ephesus, etc., — many were gathered to the gospel feast. All ranks, classes, and conditions of men came to the banquet of love. These people were manifestly willing to come, for the King's servants "gathered together all as man: as they found." Characters outwardly very different united in obeying the summons: both bad and, good, were collected at the table. The best gathering into the visible church will be sure to be a mixture in the present imperfect state of humanity; there will be some admitted who ought not to be there. Tares will grow among the wheat; corn and chaff will lie on the same floor; dross will be mingled with precious gold; goats will get in among the sheep; the gospel net will enclose fish of every kind, "both bad and good."

And the wedding was furnished with guests: happy, willing, wondering, enthusiastic guests found themselves lifted from the highways into royal company; the beggar was taken from the dunghill to sit with princes in the presence of the King. Hallelujah! Thus the King was happy, the Prince was honored, the festal hall was filled; and all went merry as a marriage bell. What

shouts of joy would go up from these outcasts as they sat at the royal table! Everything was ready for the feast before, nothing was wanting but guests to partake of the King's bounty; now that they had come, surely all would go well. We shall see.

11. *And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment.*

The success of the servants in filling the banqueting-hall was not altogether so great as it appeared to be at first sight; at least, it was not so perfect as to be without admixture. The guests continued to pour into the palace, putting on the robes provided by the King, and sitting down with honest delight to enjoy the good things prepared for them; but there was one among them who hated the King, and his Son, and who resolved to come into the festive assembly without wearing the robe of gladness, and thus to show, even in the royal presence, his contempt for the whole proceedings. He came because he was invited, but he came only in appearance. The banquet was intended to honor the King's Son, but this man meant nothing of the kind; he was willing to eat the good things set before him, but in his heart there was no love either for the King, or his well-beloved Son.

His presence was tolerated till a certain solemn moment: when the King came in to see the guests. Then the eye, which looks over all things, but overlooks nothing, spied out the daring intruder: he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. The wedding garment represents anything that is indispensable to a Christian, but which the unrenewed heart is not willing to accept. The man who had not on the wedding garment was out of sympathy with the assembly, out of harmony with its object, devoid of loyalty to the King, yet he braved and brazened it out, and thrust himself in among the wedding guests. It was a piece of defiant insolence, which could not be allowed to pass unnoticed and unpunished. In some respects he was worse than those who refused the invitation; for while he professed to accept it, he only came that he might insult the King to his face. He would not put on the garment which was freely provided, because by doing so he would have been honoring the Prince, whose marriage was to him an object of contempt and scorn.

It is well to remember that there are foes of the heavenly King, not only outside the professing church of Christ, but also within its borders. Some altogether

refuse to come to his Son's weddings, but others help to fill the banqueting-hall, yet all the while they are enemies to the great Founder of the feast. This man without the wedding garment is the type of those who, in these days, pretend to be Christians, but do not honor the Lord Jesus, nor his atoning sacrifice, nor his holy Word. They are not in accord with the design of the gospel feast, namely, the glory, of the Lord Jesus in his saints. They come into the church for gain, for honor, for fashion, or for the purpose of undermining the loyal faith of others. 'The godly can often see them: this man must have been conspicuous amongst the wedding guests. The traitors within the church, however, have most to fear from the coming of the King; he will detect them in a moment, even as the royal Host in the parable, as soon as he came in to see the guests, saw there the man who had not on the wedding garment.

12. *And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.*

The King addressed him kindly enough: He saith unto him, "Friend." Perhaps, after all, he did not intend to insult the King; therefore he called him "friend." He pretended to be a friend, therefore the King addressed him as such. Still, it was a grave outrage that he had committed, and he must account for it: "How camest thou hither not having a wedding garment?" "Was it by accident or design? Did not the keeper of the wardrobe tell thee about the garments provided for all my guests? Didst thou not feel like a speckled bird as thou didst see all thy companions in wedding array, while thine own garb ill became this festal hall? If thou art an enemy, how camest thou in hither? Was there no other place in which to defy me than in my own palace? Was there no other time for this insult than my Son's wedding day? What hast thou to say as an explanation or excuse for thy strange conduct? "Notice, how personal the question is. The King addresses him as though he had been the only one present.

And he was speechless. He had a fair opportunity of excusing himself if he could; but he was awed by the King's majesty, and convicted by his own conscience. No evidence needed to be given against him; he stood before the whole company, self-condemned, guilty of open and undeniable disloyalty. The original says, "he was muzzled." He may have talked glibly enough before the King came in; he had not a word to say afterwards. Eloquent silence that! Why did he not even then fall on his knees, and seek forgiveness for his daring crime? Alas! pride made him incapable of repentance; he would not yield even at the

last moment.

There is no defense for a man who is in the Church of Christ, but whose heart is not right towards God. The King still comes in to see the guests who have accepted his royal invitation to his Son's wedding. Woe be to any whom he finds without the wedding, garment!

13. *Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

He had, by his action, if not in words, said, "I am a free man, and will do as I like." So the king said to the servants "Bind him." Pinion him; let him never be free again. He had made too free with holy things; he had actively insulted the King, he had lifted up his hand in rebellion, and dared to set his foot within the King's palace: "Bind him hands and foot." Prepare the criminal for execution; let there be no possibility of the rebel's escape. He is where he ought not to be: "Take him away." The King's palace is no place for traitors. Sometimes this sentence of excommunication is executed by the church, when deceivers are put out of the ranks of the Lord's people by just discipline; but it is more fully carried out in the hour of death. It is worthy of note that the word for "servants "in this verse is not the same as that used in verses 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10. There it is douloi, here it is diakonoi, "ministers", meaning the angels, whose business it is especially to gather out of Christ's kingdom "all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (13:41), "and sever the wicked from among the just" (13:49).

The man in the parable had refused the robe of light, so the king says to his servants, "Cast him into outer darkness." Cast him away, as men throw weeds over the garden wall, or shake off vipers into the fire. Cast him far away from the banquet-hall where torches flame and lamps are bright, "into outer darkness." It will be all the darker to him now that he has seen the light within. His daring insolence deserves the most signal punishment: he is appointed to a place where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." It will be no place of repentance, for the tears shed there will not be those of godly sorrow for sin; but hot scalding streams from eyes that flash with the fire of rebellion and envy burning in unsubdued hearts. The "gnashing of teeth" shows the character of the "weeping." The outcast from God would gnash his teeth in all the fury of disappointed hatred, which had been foiled in its attempt to bring dishonor upon

the :King in connection with his Son’s wedding. Those who are professedly Christian, and yet really unbelieving and disobedient, will have such a doom as is here described. May the Lord in mercy save all of us from such a fearful fate!

14. *For many are called, but few are chosen.*

Many are called: the limit lies not there. We preach no restricted gospel. All who hear that gospel are called, but it does not come with power to every heart: but few are chosen. The result goes to show that, one way and another, the mass miss the wedding feast, and a few choice spirits find it by the choice of God’s grace.

These words, of course, relate to the whole parable. Those who were “called “included the rejectors of the King’s invitation; who, by their refusal, proved that they were not “chosen.” Even amongst those who accepted the invitation there was one who was not “chosen”, for he insulted the King in his own palace, and showed his enmity by his disobedience to the royal requirements. There were, however, “chosen” ones; and sufficient to fill the festal hall of the great King, and to render due honor to the wedding of his Son. Blessed are all they that shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb! May the writer and all his readers be amongst that chosen company, and for ever adore the distinguishing grace of God which has so highly favored them!

15. *Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk..*

Then went the Pharisees: they must have perceived that the parable of the wedding, feast, like that of the wicked husbandmen, was spoken against them. Our Lord’s words, however, did not move them to repentance; but only increased their malice and hatred against him. Their hearts were hardened, and their consciences soared; so they took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. They would not acknowledge that Christ was the wisdom of God and the power of God; had they done so, they would not have attempted their impossible task. They, saw that, to ensnare Jesus in his talk, was a difficult undertaking; and therefore they “took counsel” how they might accomplish it. If he had been as faulty as we are, they might have succeeded; for men who wish to entrap us in our talk need not consult much about how to do it.

This incident teaches us that men who can be as precise and formal as these Pharisees were, can yet deliberately set themselves to entangle an opponent. Great outward religiousness may consist with the meanest spirit.

16. *And they sent out him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither caress thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men,*

They sent out unto him their disciples: they were probably ashamed to appear again in the presence of Christ, after his exposure of their conduct towards himself as the King's Son; so they despatched a select detachment of their disciples, in the hope that the scholars might succeed where their teachers had failed. With the Herodians: the disciples of the Pharisees were to be reinforced by a company from an opposite section of the enemies of Christ. The united band could operate against Jesus from different sides. The Pharisees hated the rule of a foreign power, while the Herodians advocated the supremacy of Caesar. Differing as these two sections did, even to mutual hate, they for the time laid aside their own disputes, that they might in one way or another ensnare our Lord.

They began with fair speeches. They addressed Jesus by a title of respect, "Master": they only used the word in hypocrisy; but they professed to regard him as a teacher of the Law, and an authority on disputed points of doctrine or practice. They also admitted his sincerity and truthfulness: "We know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth." They further praised him for his fearlessness: "neither caress thou for any man." They then lauded him for his impartiality: "for thou regardest not the person of men." "Thou wilt speak without any regard for what Caesar, or Pilate, or Herod, or any of us may think, or say, or do." Thus did they try to throw him off his guard by what they uttered in sheer flattery. All that they said was true; but they did not mean it. From their lips it was mere cajolery. Let us take note that, when evil men are very loud in their praises of us, they usually have some wicked design against us. They fawn and flatter that they may deceive and destroy.

17. *Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?*

“Tell us therefore”: “because thou art true, because thou teaches” the way of God in truth, because thou caress not for any man’s opinion when thou art thy self in the right, and because thou regardest not the person of men, but darest to speak the truth, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear; tell us therefore, What thinkest thou?” “We are very anxious to have thy opinion upon this important point; on which some teach one thing, some another. It is a matter of great public interest everybody is talking about it; it must have been considered in all its bearings by such a learned teacher as thou art, and we should like to know thy thoughts upon it: What thinkest thou a “Dear innocents! Much they wanted instruction from him! All the while that they were speaking, they were inwardly gloating over the triumph which they felt sure would be theirs, when by any answer that he might give, or even by his silence, he must provoke the animosity of one portion of the people, or the other.

Here is the question they put to our Lord: “Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?” They referred to the annual capitation tax, imposed by the Romans, which was the cause of great indignation among the Jews, and led to frequent insurrections. Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37), one of the many pretended Messiahs, had taught that it was not lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, and he had perished in consequence of his rebellion against Rome. Christ’s questioners may have hoped that some such fate should befall him.

Their question was a delicate and difficult one in many ways. Any answer whatever would bristle with points by which his enemies hoped to entrap him. If he said, “It is lawful,” then they would denounce him as in league with the oppressor of his people, and a traitor to the Theocracy of which they boasted, even though they had virtually cast off the divine rule over then. If he said, “It is not lawful,” they could accuse him to the Roman governor as exciting the multitude to rebellion. This was, in fact, one of the false accusations brought against Jesus when he was before Pilate: “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding, to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a king.” If he remained silent, they would twit him with being a coward who did not dare to say what he thought, lest he should offend his hearers. Very cleverly was the net spread; but those who had so cunningly made and laid it little thought that they were only setting a snare in which they themselves would be caught. Thus doth it often happen, as David said, “The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.”

18. *But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?*

Our great thought-rending King was not to be deceived either by their flattery or their crafty questioning: But Jesus perceived their wickedness; for it was that, with a vengeance. Malice and deceit designed his overthrow; but he saw through the cunning of his enemies, and perceived the wickedness that prompted them thus to assail him. Onlookers may not have perceived their wickedness, and our Lord's disciples may have been puzzled as to how he would reply; but, as in all other trying circumstances, Jesus himself knew what he would do.

Probably even his enemies did not expect such a question as he now put to them: "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?" They hoped that they had disguised their real purpose so cleverly, that they must have been surprised to have the mask so quickly torn from their faces, and to be exposed to public gaze in their true character as "hypocrites." Jesus compared them to stage-players, dissemblers, men acting a false part with intent to deceive. Rightly did he name them ; and wisely did he say to them, "Why tempt ye me? "It is as if he had said, "You see that I am not deceived by your false and flattering speeches, I can read the malice that is written in a our hearts, you are just powerless before me if I choose to treat you as I can do; what can poor, puny creatures, such as ye are, do against me? Why tempt ye me? "There is infinite scorn in our Savior's question; yet there is an undertone of pity even for those who deserved it not: "Why tempt ye me? Have I given you any cause why you should seek to entrap me? Why are, you so foolish as to ask questions which must be to your own hurt?"

Whenever men pretend great reverence for Jesus, and then seek, by their erroneous teaching, or their science falsely so-called, to overthrow his gospel, they are base hypocrites.

19. *Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.*

Having exposed their folly and hypocrisy, Jesus proceeds to put them publicly to shame. He said to them, "Shew me the tribute money." This request on his part, and their compliance with it, would make the whole matter more vivid and impressive to the bystanders. When there is something to see and handle, a lesson becomes the more striking. Our Lord asked them to show him a specimen

of the coin usually paid for the capitation tax: and they brought unto him a penny, a denarius. This coin represented the daily pay of a Roman soldier, and in the parable of the vineyard it was said to be the daily wage of the laborer. Had these men guessed the use to which Jesus would put the denarius, they would not have so quickly procured one for him. They bought their own confusion with that coin. They would never afterwards be able to look upon the tribute money without remembering how they were foiled in their attempt to entangle the hated Nazarene.

20, 21. *And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*

He asked another question, that they might themselves assist in replying to themselves: He saith unto them, "Whose is this image and superscription? "Or rather, inscription. Before them were the image and inscription of the Roman emperor on the piece of money; but he would make them say as much, so he asks, "Whose is this?" The Jewish Rabbis taught that "if a king's coin is current in a country, the men of the country do thereby evidence that they acknowledge him for their lord."

When we are dealing with ungodly men, it is well if we can make them to be their own accusers.

They say unto him, "Caesar's", No other answer was possible. This tribute money was not a shekel of Jewish coinage, but money of the Roman empire. This was a plain proof that, whether they liked it or not, they were Roman subjects, and Caesar was their ruler. What then must follow but that they should pay to their acknowledged ruler his due? Then saith he unto them, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." Whatever belongs to Caesar is to be rendered, to him. Jesus did not say what was Caesar's, the coin itself settled the question of paying tribute; his reply covered all the duties of loyal subjects to the ruler under whose jurisdiction they lived; but this did not touch the sovereignty of God. Jehovah held rule over consciences and hearts; and they must see to it that, as Caesar had his own, the Lord had his own also. Render therefore "unto God the things that are God's." This was not an evasive reply on Christ's part; it was full of meaning, and very much to the point; and yet

it was so put that neither Pharisees nor Herodians could make anything out of it for party purposes, or for their wretched design of entangling Jesus in his talk. Neither of the two sects turned a penny by their penny.

To us the lesson of this incident is, that the State has its sphere, and we must discharge our duties to it; but we must not forget that God has his throne, and we must not allow the earth-kingdom to make us traitors to the heaven-kingdom. Caesar must keep, his place and by no means go beyond it; but God must have the spiritual dominion to himself alone.

22. *When they had heard these words, they marveled, and left him, and went their way.*

They had some sense left even if they had no feeling. They saw that their plot had ignominiously failed; they marveled at the wisdom with which Christ had baffled their cunning; the, knew that it was hopeless to continue the conflict: so they left him, and went their way. Their way was not his way. They had already admitted, in their a flattering speech, that he was a true teacher of God's way; and now they. completed their own condemnation by leaving him, and going their own way.

Lord, save us from following their evil example! Rather, may we cleave to Christ, and go his way!

23. *The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,*

The same day: there was no rest for Jesus; as soon as one set of enemies was driven away, another company marched up to attack him. He had silenced the Pharisees and the Herodians; now there came to him the Sadducees, the broad churchmen, the rationalists of our Savior's day: which say that there is no resurrection. They rejected a great deal more of the teaching of the Scriptures than this one point of the resurrection; but this is specially mentioned here as it was the subject on which they hoped to entrap or confuse the Savior. The Sadducees "say that there is no resurrection"; yet they came to Christ to ask what would happen, in a certain contingency, "in the resurrection." They evidently thought that they could state a case which would bring into contempt the

doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. They might have taken warning from the experience of the Pharisees and the Herodians; but doubtless they felt so sure of their own position that they expected to succeed though the others had so conspicuously failed.

24. *Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise Up seed unto his brother.*

“Master;” they came with affected respect for the great “Teacher.” They were as polite as the previous company of assailants; but, like them, though the words of their mouth were smoother than butter, war was in their heart: though their words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords (Psalm 55:21).

“Moses said”: they gave the substance, though not the exact words recorded in Deuteronomy 25:5. The law of Moses, in this as in many other shatters, recognized existing customs, and imposed certain regulations upon them. For a man to die without leaving a child to bear his name, and enter upon his inheritance, was regarded as so great a calamity that the Jews judged that every possible means must be taken to prevent it. The practice here described prevails among various Oriental nations even to this day.

25-28. *Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven if or they all had her.*

These Sadducees may have known such a case as they stated, though it is extremely unlikely; more probably, this was one of the stock stories they were in the habit of telling in order to cast ridicule upon the resurrection. They had no belief in spiritual beings; therefore, they supposed that, if there were a future state, it would be similar to the present. Having stated their case, they put to the Savior this perplexing question: “In the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.” They doubtless thought that this question would puzzle Christ, as it had puzzled others to whom it had been put; but he had no more difficulty in answering this than he had with the previous enquiries.

29. *Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.*

Jesus answered and said unto them, “Ye do err:” the error was not with him, but with them. Their supposed argument was based on their own erroneous notions about the unseen world; and when the light of God’s Word was poured upon their seven men of straw, they vanished into thin air. The answer to objectors, skeptics, infidels today, may be given in our Lord’s words: “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.” These Sadducees thought that they had found a difficulty in the Scriptures; but their error arose from their “not knowing the Scriptures.” This is the root of almost all error, ignorance of the Inspired Word of God. These men were acquainted with the letter, but they did not really know the Scriptures, or they would have found there abundant revelations concerning the resurrection.

Their error arose, also, from ignorance of “the power of God.” The resurrection of the dead is one of the greatest proofs of the power of God, with whom all things are possible. These Sadducees limited the Holy One of Israel in their ignorance or denial of his power. What is there about the resurrection that is incredible to the man who knows “the power of God”? Surely, he, who created all things by the word of his power, can, by that same power, raise the dead in his own appointed time.

30. *For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.*

“In the resurrection” our Lord implied that there is a resurrection; he did not even stay to prove that truth, but went on to speak of the resurrection life as being of a higher order than our present natural life: “they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in hearer.” Our Savior’s answer struck at another Sadducean error; his questioners did not believe in angels. Jesus did not attempt to prove the existence of angels; but took that fact also for granted, by saying that, “in the resurrection “men” are as the angels of God in heaven.” He did not say that they are changed into angels; but, as Luke records his words, “they are equal unto the angels.” They are spiritual beings, as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15.

31, 32. *But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*

Our Savior now gives these Sadducees further instruction “as touching the resurrection of the dead.” He used the formula he so often employed in speaking to those who professed to read the Scriptures:

“Have ye not read?” You reject the oral traditions which the Pharisees accept and teach in place of the commandments of God, have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God?” Jesus always manifested the utmost reverence for the revealed Word of God. He here showed that the truth made known in the Scriptures is a very personal matter This message was spoken unto these Sadducees, although they knew it not; it was spoken by God, yet they received it not.

How necessary it is that we should search the scriptures, lest there should be divinely-revealed truths that so have not even read! How needful, also, is the teaching of the Holy Spirit, lest we should read, as these Sadducees did, and yet not know the Scriptures!

Jesus might have referred to many passages in the Old Testament about the resurrection; but as the Sadducees regarded the Pentateuch with special honor, he quoted what Moses had recorded in Exodus 3:6: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;” and then added his own comment and exposition: “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had long been dead when the Lord spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. His words implied that the patriarchs were still living. His covenant was made with those who still existed.

There is much teaching in this truth, that “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Some suppose that, until the resurrection, the saints are virtually non-existent; but this cannot a be. Though disembodied, they still live; Jesus does not argue about it, but he states the fact as beyond all question. The living God is the God of diving men; and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive, and identified as the same persons who lived on the earth. God is the God of Abraham’s body as well as of his soul, for the covenant seal was set upon his

flesh. The grave cannot hold any portion of the covenanted ones; God is the God of our entire being, spirit, soul, and body.

33. *And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine.*

Our Lord's reply to the Sadducees was so complete that they were "put to silence" (v. 34). They did not attempt any further assault upon him, for they must have been convinced of their own impotence. Those who had stood by as listeners, the multitude, that had gathered as crowds delight to do when there is a public discussion, were astonished at his doctrine. They were "astonished" both at the matter and the manner of Christ's teaching. This is an expression that we often find in the life of our Lord; but apparently those who were "astonished" did not accept his teaching. They talked to one another about the marvelous way in which he answered all questions; but they did not admit that such a Teacher could be none other than the long looked-for Messiah. Even the scribes, who complimented Christ upon his answer (Luke 20:39), saying, "Master, thou hast well said," did not follow up that confession by becoming his disciples.

34. *But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.*

The multitude that had listened to Christ, and had been "astonished" at his answers to the Sadducees, would soon publish the tidings of their defeat When the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they doubtless felt pleased that their natural enemies had been routed, but grieved that Jesus had again proved victorious in argument. He had, in one day, baffled the chief priests and elders of the people, Pharisees and their disciples, Herodians and Sadducees. If he continued to prevail, all the people would be won over to his side. So once more they met in consultation: they were gathered together. They must think of some fresh device, some new plan for his overthrow. How persevering wicked men are in their evil courses! While we deplore their wickedness, let us imitate their persistency.

35. *The one of them, which was a lawyer asked him a question, tempting him, and saying,*

Apparently, the result of their conference was that they selected one of their number to put to Jesus another enquiry: one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question. Mark says that this man was one of the scribes, one of those constantly engaged in copying the Law, and also one who explained its meaning to the people. He was a gentleman “learned in the Law.” He came, either as the representative of the Pharisees, or on his own account, and asked Jesus a question, tempting him. Putting the mildest meaning on the word “tempting”, it conveys the idea of testing and trying in an unfriendly sense. Probably he was a man of clearer light and greater discernment than his associates; for he was evidently only half-hearted in the work of “tempting” Christ. Mark says that he had heard our Lord’s words to the Sadducees, “and perceiving that he had answered them well,” he put his own question to Jesus. He was evidently a man of candor, possessing a considerable amount of spiritual knowledge. This may help to explain the reason for his question:—

36. *Master, which is the great commandment in the law?*

According to the Rabbis, there were many commandments which were secondary, and others which were of the first importance. They often put commands, which really were comparatively small, on a par with those which were greatest. One of them even ventured to say that the commands of the Rabbis were more important than the commands of the Law, because the commands of the Law were little and great, but all the commands of the Rabbis were great. Some of them regarded eating with unwashen hands as being as great a crime as murder; and they would classify the rubbing of ears of corn together on the Sabbath-day with adultery; so that they caused great confusion as to the real order of moral precepts. It was, therefore, most desirable to get from this wise Teacher, whom the scribe addressed as “Master”, an authoritative answer to the question, “Which is the great commandment in the law? “The enquiry was one which would be sure to entangle the Savior if he did not answer it wisely; and therein the lawyer tempted, tested, tried, and proved him.

Blessed be his dear name, he can stand any test to which he may be put! Satan tempted, tested, and tried him to the uttermost of his power; but even he never found any flaw, or fault, or failing in him.

37, 38. *Jesus said unto him. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all*

thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

These were very familiar words to our Lord's hearers, for all devout Jews were in the habit of repeating them every morning and evening. Deuteronomy 6:4-9, from which our Savior quoted, was one of the four passages which were worn as "phylacteries" (23:5). Jesus, said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." Because he is our God, Jehovah claims our heart's love. As our Creator, Preserver, Provider, and Judge, he commands us to yield to him all our heart's affection; to love him first, best, heartiest; out of all comparison to the love we have to any fellow-creature, or to ourselves.

"And with all thy soul." We are to love God with all our life, to love him more than our life; so that, if necessary, we would give up our life rather than give up our love to God.

"And with all thy mind." We are to love God with our intellect, with all the powers of our mind, bringing memory, thought, imagination, reason, judgment, and all our mental powers, as willing subjects to bow at God's feet in adoration and love.

"This is the first and great commandment." It is "first" in point of time, for it was binding upon the angels before man was created; it was binding upon Adam from the hour of his creation in the image of God. It is "first" in importance, for there is no love to a creature worthy of comparison with love to the Creator. This commandment is also "great", because it comprehends all others, and because its demands are so great, namely, the whole love of our heart, and soul, and mind.

Who can render to God this perfect love? None of our fallen race. Salvation by the words of the Law is clearly an impossibility, for we cannot obey even the first commandment. There is One who has obeyed it, and the obedience of Christ is reckoned as, the obedience of all who trust him. Being free from legal condemnation, they seek ever after to obey this "great and first commandment" (R.V.) by the power of the Holy! Spirit, who dwells within them.

39. *And the second is like unto it, Thou shall love thy a neighbor as thyself.*

The answer is wider than the question. The lawyer asked about “the great commandment”; Christ answered his enquiry, and then added, “and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Who of us has really loved his neighbor as himself? Under the Gospel this commandment is certainly not less binding than under the law.

40. *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

The teaching of Moses and all the prophets might be summarized in “these two commandments.” The duty of loving God and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves is the supreme subject of the divine revelation. On this, as on a great peg, “hang all the law and the prophets.” Remove the peg, and what have you left as a support for the teaching given by the Lord through the holy men of old who wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost?

41, 42. *While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David.*

‘The King now carried the war into the enemy’s country. He had answered all the questions put to him; it was his turn to propound some to those who had come to examine him. While the Pharisees were gathered together, that is, while they still lingered near him, disappointed and defeated, yet watching for any opportunity of assailing him, Jesus asked them, saying, “What think ye of Christ,” “Our Lord here sets his servants the example of how they should deal with cavilers, quibblers, objectors. Having wisely answered all their questions, he pressed home upon them the question of questions: “What think ye of Christ?” They had tried to puzzle him with their enquiries about Church and State, the future life, and the relative value of the commandments; but he put to them the much more vital question, “What think ye of Christ?”

Jesus also pressed upon his hearers further enquiry about “the Christ” (R. V.), for the words used evidently mean the Messiah: “Whose son is he?” They say unto him “The son of David.” They knew that the promised Deliverer would be descended from David; but they either did not know, or would not confess, that he had a divine as well as a human origin. This the Savior brings out by further questions.

43-45. *He saith unto them, How them doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?*

These questions of our Lord themselves contain the answers to the present-day critics who deny the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and the Davidic authorship and Messianic application of certain Psalms. He saith unto them, "How then doth David in spirit call him Lord?" quoting from Psalm 110:1, "saying, The LORD said unto My Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool," our Savior declared that these were the words of David, speaking "by the Holy Ghost" (see Mark 12:36), concerning the Christ, the Messiah. This ought for ever to settle the question about the inspiration, authorship, and application of that Psalm at least. "The LORD said unto my Lord," — Jehovah said unto my Adonai: David, by the Holy Ghost; learned what the Father said unto the Son; and thus he was brought into connection with the whole sacred Trinity. "Sit thou on my right hand": the Messiah was bidden to rest after his great mediatorial work was accomplished, and to sit on his Father's right hand, in the place of honor, power, and majesty. "Till I make thine enemies thy footstool": Jesus is to keep his seat till his foes are all prostrate at his feet.

This was the problem the Pharisees had to solve: if the Messiah was David's Son, how was it that David, by the Holy Ghost, called him his Lord? The Christ must be something more than mere man; otherwise the Psalmist's words would have been unsuitable, and even blasphemous. He was higher than the angels, for unto none of them did Jehovah ever stay, "Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool "(Hebrews 1:13).

46. *And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions. If the Pharisees could have denied that the Psalm had reference to the Messiah, it would have been easy for them to reply to Christ's question; but no man was able to answer him a word. The Rabbis of our Savior's day admitted that this was one of the Messianic Psalms, without recognizing what their admission involved; in later times, as at the present day, false teachers sought to wrest it from its proper meaning.*

Christ’s questions silenced his adversaries in a double sense; first, they could not answer him a word; and next, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any He remained Master of the field. They could not entrap or entangle him in his talk; if they would put him to silence, they must do it by putting him to death.

Matthew 23

1. *Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, saying, The sribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*

Then spake Jesus to the multitude: the King commenced his final address to the people. He was soon to withdraw himself from them; but first he would put them on their guard against their false teachers. They had heard what he had said to the scribes and Pharisees; now they would hear what he said of them. And to his disciples: according to Luke, Jesus spoke to his disciples "in the audience of all the people." His theme was one that concerned the whole population as well as his own disciples. He knew that he would shortly be taken away from them; therefore he warned them against those who would seek their ruin: "Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do." It was the duty of Moses to expound to the people the Law of God. The scribes and Pharisees occupied his place; but alas! the Spirit that guided him was not in them. They spoke as from the chair of Moses, ex cathedra, as we say; and as far as they really filled his seat, and followed his sayings, their words were to be obeyed. Our Savior could not have intended the people to heed their false comments and foolish glosses upon the Law of Moses; for he had already declared that by their traditions they had transgressed the commandment of God, and made it of none effect.

At this time, however, our Lord was speaking of another grievous fault in the scribes and Pharisees; namely, that they said one thing and did another: "But do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." Sad indeed is the state of that religious teacher of whom the Searcher of hearts has to say, "Do as he says, and not as he does." Many such are with us still, preaching one thing, and practicing another. May the Lord preserve the people from following their evil example!

4. *For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.*

The contrast between the true Teacher and the false ones is clearly brought out by this verse: "They bind heavy burdens to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders." Their regulations as to moral and ceremonial observances were like huge faggots or crushing burdens bound together, and made into a weight intolerable for any man to carry. Many of these rules by themselves were grievous enough; but all together they formed a yoke that neither the people nor their fathers could bear. The scribes and Pharisees piled the great load upon them; but neither helped them; to sustain it, nor offered to relieve them of any portion of it: "they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." How different was Christ's teaching: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" Taking their burdens of sin and sorrow and care upon his own shoulders, he exchanges them for his easy yoke, which itself gives rest to all who wear it.

5-7. *But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogue, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.*

This was the fatal flaw in their character: "But all their works they do for to be seen of men." So long as they stood well in the sight of their fellow-creatures, they cared little or nothing how they appeared to the eye of God. They were very particular about the literal observance of certain Mosaic injunctions, although they completely missed the spiritual meaning of them: "They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments." Four passages from the Law, Exodus 3:3-10, 11-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 11:13-21, were written on strips of parchment, and worn on the forehead and the hand or arm as amulets, or preservatives. These the scribes and Pharisees made especially prominent, yet all the while the Word of the Lord was not hidden in their hearts, nor obeyed in their lives. The Lord commanded the children of Israel to make fringes in the borders of their garments, and upon the fringe a ribband or thread of blue, that they

might look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them (Numbers 15:38, 39). These ritualists of our Savior's day were very scrupulous about having deep fringes or large tassels to their garments; but they remembered not the commandments of the Lord to do them. Many keep the laws of God to the eye, but violate them in the heart From such deceit may the Spirit of truth preserve us!

Jesus next put together four things that the scribes and Pharisees loved: "the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi." Whether they met with their fellow-men for feasting, for worship, for business, or for instruction, they loved to be first and foremost. This is a common sin, and one into which we may easily fall. Our Lord felt it necessary to warn even his disciples against that evil, for his next words were evidently spoken specially to them.

8-10. *But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man you father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ.*

In the Church of Christ, all titles and honors which exalt men and give occasion for pride are here forbidden. In the Christian commonwealth we should seek to realize a truer "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," than that for which the world clamors in vain. He who is called "Rabbi" robs Christ of his honor as the only Master or Teacher of his disciples: "for one is your Master, even, Christ." He also takes from his fellow-Christians the privilege that they share equally with him: "and all ye are brethren." Those who use such titles as "Holy Father "and "Right Reverend Father in God "would have a difficulty in explaining any our Savior's words: "Call, no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven." In the tenth verse, our Lord's words might be rendered: "Neither be ye called leaders (guides, instructors): for one is your Leader (Guide, Instructor), even the Christ (the Messiah)." If we follow him, we cannot go wrong.

11, 12. *But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.*

This is nearly the same lesson that is recorded in chapter 20., verse 27. Our Lord had to repeat many times this law of his kingdom: “He that is greatest among you shall be your servant.” You are all equal; but if there is one amongst you who claims to be the greatest, he shall be the servant of all. Where our King rules, any one of his disciples who exalts himself shall be abased; while, on the other hand, the one who humbles himself shall be exalted. The way to rise is to sink self; the lower we fall in our own esteem, the higher shall we rise in our Master’s estimation.

13. *But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.*

While our Savior was speaking to the people and his disciples, the scribes and Pharisees may have again drawn near. At any rate, his next words were addressed to them: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” This is the first of eight “woes”, in which the Lord Jesus both foretells the doom of the hypocrites gathered before him, and reveals the depth of his pity even for them. In seven of the eight “woes” he calls them “hypocrites”, in one he addresses them as “blind guides.” This first “woe” was pronounced against them because, as far as they could, they “shut up the kingdom of heaven against men.” This was a terrible charge to be brought against them by him who could read their hearts, and who could truthfully say to them, “for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” They ought to have helped men into the kingdom; instead of doing so, they hindered those who were entering. Are there not false teachers, nowadays, who put stumbling-stones instead of stepping-stones in the way of those who are entering the kingdom of heaven?

14. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour windows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.*

The second “woe” was supported by two most serious accusations, which our Lord would not have uttered if they had not been true: “ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayer.” Either of these sins by itself would have been very grievous; the two together were sufficient to sink those who were

guilty of them to the lowest hell. The men who had defrauded widows would have to answer for their misdeeds to the widows' "Judge "(Psalm 68:5). Those who had sought to cover their crimes with the cloak of superior sanctity deserved to be stripped before the people they had deceived, and to hear the King's righteous sentence: "Therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation." These words prove that there are degrees of punishment, as there are gradations in glory. All the ungodly will be judged and condemned by the Righteous Judge, but "the greater condemnation" will be reserved for the hypocrites who have "for a pretense" made "long prayers" while, behind the mask, they have been devouring the property of widows and the fatherless.

15. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*

The third "woe" related to the unholy zeal of the scribes and Pharisees in gaining adherents to Judaism and their own party, and by the process making them even worse than themselves. They freely gave time and trouble to the work with the prospect of a very slight return: "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte." They would, as it were, drag the Great Sea with a seine net in the hope of entangling one proselyte in its meshes; or they would go over all the land in order to persuade one Gentile to be circumcised so as to become "a Jew outwardly." The result to the proselyte was only evil: "When he is made, ye make him two fold: more the child of hell than yourselves." Perverts usually become bigots. The proselyte would naturally imitate the vices of his hypocritical teachers, without having that knowledge of the Scriptures which might to some extent exercise a wholesome restraint upon them. The circumcised heathen would be a Judas rather than a Jew, a veritable "son of perdition."

16-19. *Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools and blind: for*

whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

The form of the fourth “woe” differs from all the rest; in the other seven, our Savior said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! “In this case, his words were, “Woe unto you, ye blind guides!” They were nominally the religious guides of the Jews; but they were really “blind guides.” Sin, prejudice, bigotry, and hypocrisy had blinded their eyes. They reckoned themselves to be the wise men of the nation; but Jesus addressed them as both “fools and blind.” There are none so stupid as those who will not learn, and none so blind as those who will not see. This was the case with the scribes and Pharisees; they were willfully foolish and willingly blind.

Our Lord here condemned their misleading teaching concerning oaths.

They actually taught that, if a man swore “by the temple”, his oath was not binding; but that, if he swore “by the gold of the temple”, he was bound by his oath; and, in like manner, they declared that an oath “by the altar” was not binding; but that, if a man swore “by the gift that is upon the altar”, he was bound by his oath! We marvel not at our Savior’s indignant exclamation: “Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?.. the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?” The sanctity lay in the temple and the altar, not in the gold or the gift.

Jesus had forbidden all swearing (chapter 5., verses 34-36); so that he was not exalting one form of oath over another, but rather pointing out the folly and blindness of the scribes and Pharisees in reversing the right order of things. If any swearing, had been permissible, an oath “by the temple” must have been more binding than one “by the gold of the temple” yet these false teachers said, “It is nothing.” When men once quit the plain teaching of Christ, it is easy for them to go into all manner of heresies and absurdities.

20-22. *Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon”*.

The Jews invented fantastic forms of swearing in order to evade the use of the divine name. Our Lord therefore next proved the utter failure of all their attempts. Swearing “by the altar” was swearing “by all things thereon.” An oath “by the temple” was really “by him that dwelleth therein.” The binding force of the oath could not lie in the mere building; but in the most High God, who condescended to dwell therein. Many Jews would swear “by heaven”, although they would not call God to be a witness to their adjuration; but Jesus showed that they were doing the very thing they tried to avoid: “He that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.” The only right course for us is to obey our Lord’s command, “I say unto you, swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”

23, 24. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.*

In this fifth “woe” our Lord called the scribes and Pharisees both “hypocrites “and “blind: guides.” They were “hypocrites” as to their own character and conduct, and “blind guides” as the religious leaders of the nation. Jesus first spoke of their scrupulous attention to certain minor matters: “Ye pay tithe of of mint and anise and cummin.” Some of them were so punctilious about paying tithes that they even gave to the temple service the tenth of the herbs they bought in the market, as well as of those they grew in their gardens. Although they were so particular about things that were of secondary importance, they “omitted the weightier, matters of the law, judgment (or, justice) mercy, and faith.” Their hearts were not right in the sight of God, therefore their minds were unbalanced; they counted the lesser requirements of the Law as of the first importance, while they “omitted the weightier matters” altogether. Our Lord did not blame them for paying the tithes; but he showed that they ought first to have exercised “justice, mercy and faith”: “these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” No commandment of God is non-essential; but that which relates to the

condition of the heart and the life in the sight of the Lord Jehovah must receive our first and best attention.

Jesus used a very expressive simile to set forth the inconsistency of the scribes and Pharisees: “Ye blind guides, which strain at (or, out) a gnat, and swallow a camel.” They rewarded trifles as if they were of first importance, and so, as it were, strained out gnats from their wine, lest they should be choked; but they committed great sins without any compunctions of conscience, and thus, in effect, swallowed a camel, an unclean animal, equal in size to an almost innumerable quantity of gnats. There are gnat-strainers among us still, who apparently have no difficulty in swallowing a camel, “hump and all.”

25, 26. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

The sixth “woe “is uttered against the scribes and Pharisees with regard to their eating and drinking: “Ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.” They had frequent washings, both of themselves and of their vessels for eating and drinking. They did well to “make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter”; the evil consisted in the method of filling and emptying the vessels. They were filled by “extortion “, and used for “excess “; therefore all the outside washing was of no avail. Singling out one of the evildoers, our Lord said, “Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter,” get rid of “extortion”, in gathering and “excess “in consuming; then the clean cup and platter will be in harmony with that which is within them.

27, 28. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*

The reason given for the seventh “woe” reveals what the scribes and Pharisees really were like in Christ’s sight: “Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.” The annual whitewashing of the sepulchres had recently taken place, so the burial-places looked at their best; but inside the tombs corruption was doing its deadly work. They were whitewashed, not only for sanitary purposes, but mainly to keep people away from them, lest they should become defiled. Our Lord certainly did not flatter the scribes and Pharisees by this comparison; but the more closely it is examined, the more appropriate to their abominable character will it be proved to be. However much they might “outwardly appear righteous unto men”, “within” they were “full of hypocrisy and iniquity.” Well might the holy Jesus cry “Woe!” unto such foul sinners.

29-31. *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophet, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.*

The eighth “woe” referred to their false professions of reverence for “the goodly fellowship of the prophets “and “the noble army of martyrs”: “Ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous.” They pretended to have such regard for the holy men of the past that, being unable to honor them in person, they would set up monuments to their memory, and adorn their resting-places with tokens of respect. They also testified as to what they would have done if they had lived in the days of their fathers: “we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophet.” What bitter irony there was in such language from the lips of men who were even then plotting the death of the Lord of the prophets and of the righteous of all ages! Thus do men still speak with seeming horror of the dark deeds of past persecutors, whose linear descendants they are, not only according to the flesh, but also after the spirit.

Out of their own mouth our Lord condemned the hypocrites: “Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.” In effect, Jesus said to them, “You confess that you are the sons of the

murderers of the prophets. That admission carries with it far more than you imagine. You are their sons, not only by birth, but also by resemblance; you are veritable children of them which killed the prophets. If you had lived in their day you would have committed the crimes you pretend to condemn."

32. *Fill ye up then the treasure of your fathers.*

This is one of the most terrible sentences that ever fell from Christ's lips. It is like his message to Judas, "That thou doest, do quickly." The "measure" of Israel's iniquity was almost full. The Savior knew that the scribes and Pharisees were determined to put him to death, and so to complete their own condemnation. This crowning sin would fill up the measure of their fathers' guilt, and bring down upon them the righteous judgment of God.

33. *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*

Our Lord spoke very severely, but faithfulness required such language as this. A good surgeon cuts deep; so did Jesus. Our modern preachers would not talk like this, even to scribes and Pharisees who were crucifying Christ afresh, and putting him to an open shame. He is not the most loving who speaks the smoothest words; true love often compels an honest man to say that which pains him far more than it affects his callous hearers.

34-36. *Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.*

Our great King knew that his earthly life was soon to end; he was, in fact, about to utter his final farewell to the people gathered in the temple. But, before leaving them, he delivered a royal and prophetical message: "Behold, I send unto

you prophets, and wise men, and scribes." None but the King of kings could speak thus without blasphemy. These "prophets, and wise men, and scribes" would be Christ's ascension gifts to the Church and the world. He foretold what kind of reception his servants would have from the Jews: "And some of then ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them I shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city." All this was literally fulfilled.

The object of the King in sending his last representatives was that the guilty city should be left for ever without excuse when its measure of iniquity should be full, and its awful doom be sealed. "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed? upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." The destruction of Jerusalem was more terrible than anything that the world has ever witnessed, either before or since. Even Titus seemed to see in his cruel work the hand of an avenging God. Truly, the blood of the martyrs slain in Jerusalem was amply avenged when the whole city became veritable Aceldama, or field of blood.

The Kingly Prophet foretold the time of the end: "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation." It was before that generation had passed away that Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed. There was a sufficient interval for the full proclamation of the gospel by the apostles and evangelists of the early Christian Church, and for the gathering out of those who recognized the crucified Christ as their true Messiah. Then came the awful end, which the Savior foresaw and foretold, and the prospect of which wrung from his lips and heart the sorrowful lament that followed his prophecy of the doom awaiting his guilty capital.

37. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!*

What a picture of pity and disappointed love the King's face must have presented when, with flowing tears, he uttered these words! What an exquisite emblem he gave of the way in which he had sought to woo the Jews to himself: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings "What familiar tenderness! What a warm Elysium

of rest! What nourishment for the feeble! What protection for the weak! Yet it was all provided in vain: “How often would I have gathered thy children together.... and ye would not!” Oh, the awful perversity of man’s rebellious will! Let all the readers of these lines beware lest the King should ever have to utter such a lament as this over them.

38, 39. *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the lord.*

Nothing remained for the King but to pronounce the solemn sentence of death upon those who would not come unto him that they might have life: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” The whole “house” of the Jews was left desolate when Jesus departed from them; and the temple,the holy and beautiful “house”, became a spiritual desolation when Christ finally left it. Jerusalem was too far gone to be rescued from its self-sought doom.

Amid all this gloom there was one gleam of light: “For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” After his death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus, appeared many times to his disciples, but not once to the unbelieving Jews. His personal ministry to them was at an end; but it would be renewed when he should come to them a second time, without a sin-offering, unto salvation, and then they would say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” Long ages have passed since the King went away into the far country. The signs of the times all tell us that his coming draweth nigh. Oh, that Christians and Jews alike were on the look-out for the true Messiah, whose message to all is, “Behold, I am coming quickly!”

Matthew 24

1. *And Jesus went out and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

The King, having finished his final discourse in the temple, left it, never to return: Jesus went out, and departed from the temple. His ministry there was ended. As his disciples moved away with him towards the Mount of Olives, they called his attention to the great stones of which the temple was constructed, and the costly adornments of the beautiful building. To them the appearance was glorious; but to their Lord it was a sad sight. His Father's house, which ought to have been a house of prayer for all nations, had became a den of thieves, and soon would be utterly destroyed: Jesus said unto them, "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Josephus tells us that Titus at first tried to save the temple, even after it was set on fire, but his efforts were of no avail; and at last he gave orders that the whole city and temple should be levelled, except a small portion reserved for the garrison. This was so thoroughly done that the historian says that "there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited."

We sometimes delight in the temporal prosperity of the Church as if it were something that must certainly endure; but all that is external will pass away or be destroyed. Let us only reckon that to be substantial which comes from God, and is God's work. "The things which are seen are temporal."

3. *And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall*

be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

The little procession continued ascending the mount of Olives until Jesus reached a resting-place from which he could see the temple (Mark 3:3). There he sat down, and the disciples came unto him privately, saying, “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” These are the questions that have been asked in every age since our Savior’s day. There are here two distinct questions, perhaps three. The disciples enquired first about the time of the destruction of the temple, and then about the sign of Christ’s coming, and of “the consummation of the age” (R. V. margin). The answers of Jesus contained much that was mysterious, and that could only be fully understood as that which he foretold actually occurred. He told his disciples some things which related to the siege of Jerusalem, some which concerned his Second Advent, and some which would immediately precede “the end of the world.” When we have clearer light, we may possibly perceive that all our Savior’s predictions on this memorable occasion had some connection with all three of these great events.

4-6. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*

Jesus was always practical. The most important thing for his disciples was not that they might know when “these things” would be, but that they might be preserved from the peculiar evils of the time. Therefore,

Jesus answered and said unto them, “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” They were to beware lest any of the pretended Messiahs should lead them astray, as they would pervert many others. A large number of impostors came forward before the destruction of Jerusalem, giving out that they were the anointed of God; almost every page of history is blotted with the names of such deceivers; and in our own day we have seen some come in Christ’s name, saying that they are Christs. Such men seduce many; but they who heed their Lord’s warning will not be deluded by them.

Our Savior's words, "Ye shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars," might be applied to almost any period of the world's history. Earth has seldom had a long spell of quiet; there have almost always been both the realities of war, and the rumors of war. There were many such ever Jerusalem was overthrown; there have been many such ever since; and there will be many such until that glorious period when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

"See that ye be not troubled:" is a timely message for the disciples of Christ in every age. "For all these things must come to pass," therefore let us not be surprised or alarmed at them; "but the end is not yet." The destruction of Jerusalem was the beginning of the end, the great type and anticipation of all that will take place when Christ shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. It was an end; but not the end: "the end is not yet."

7, 8. *For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.*

One would think that there was sorrow enough in "famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places"; but our Lord said that "all these" were only "the beginning of sorrows", the first birth-pangs of the travail that must precede his coming, either to Jerusalem, or to the whole world. If famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are only "the beginning of sorrows", what may we not expect the end to be? This prophecy ought both to warn the disciples of Christ what they may expect, and wean them from the world where all these and greater sorrows are to be experienced.

9. *They shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.*

Our Lord not only foretold the general trial that would come upon the Jews, and upon the world; but also the special persecution which would be the portion of his chosen followers: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." The New Testament gives abundant proof of the fulfilment of these words. Even in Paul's day, "this sect" was"everywhere spoken against." Since then, has there been any

land unstained by the blood of the martyrs? Wherever Christ's gospel has been preached, men have risen up in arms against the messengers of mercy, and afflicted and killed them wherever they could.

10. *And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.*

This would be a bitter trial for the followers of Christ; yet this they have always had to endure. Persecution would reveal the traitors within the Church as well as the enemies without. In the midst of the chosen ones there would be found successors of Judas, who would be willing to betray the disciples as he betrayed his Lord. Saddest of all is the betrayal of good men by their own relatives; but even this they have many of them had to bear for Christ's sake.

11, 12. *And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

What could not be accomplished by persecutors outside the Church, and traitors inside, would be attempted by teachers of heresy: "Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." They have risen in all ages; in these modern times they have risen in clouds, till the air is thick with them, as with an army of devouring locusts. These are the men who invent new doctrines, and who seem to think that the religion of Jesus Christ is something that a man may twist into any form and shape that he pleases. Alas, that such teachers should have any disciples! It is doubly sad that they should be able to lead astray "many." Yet, when it so happens, let us remember that the King said that it would be so.

Is it, any wonder that, where such "iniquity abound" and such lawlessness is multiplied, "the love of many shall wax cold "? If the teachers deceive the people, and give them "another gospel which is not another", it is no marvel that there is a lack of love and zeal. The wonder is that there is any love and zeal left after they have been subjected to such a chilling and killing process as that adopted by the advocates of the modern "destructive criticism." Verily, it is rightly named "destructive ", for it destroys almost everything that is worth preserving.

13. *But he that shall endure unto the church the same shall be saved.*

Again our Savior reminded his disciples of the persona1 responsibility of each one of them in such a time of trial and testing as they were about to pass through. He would have them remember that it is not the man who starts in the race, but the one who runs to the goal, who wins the prize: “He that shall endure unto the end, the same.” If this doctrine were not supplemented by another, there would be but little good tidings for poor, tempted, tried, and struggling saints in such words as these. Who among us would persevere in running the heavenly race if God did not preserve us from falling, and give us persevering grace? But, blessed be his name, “The righteous shall hold on his way.” “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

14. *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

The world is to the Church like a scaffold to a building. When the Church is built, the scaffold will be taken down; the world must remain until the last elect one is saved: “Then shall the end come.” Before Jerusalem was destroyed, “this gospel of the kingdom.” was probably “preached in all the world” so far as it was then known; but there is to be a fuller proclamation of it “for a witness unto all nations” before the great consummation of all things: “then shall the end come,” and the King shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and decide the eternal destiny of the whole human race.

15-18. *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolution, spoken, of by Daniel the prophet,stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.*

This portion of our Savior’s words appears to relate solely to the destruction of Jerusalem. As soon as Christ’s disciples saw “the abomination of desolution “, that is, the Roman ensigns, with their idolatrous emblems, “stand in the holy place”, they knew that the time for them to escape had arrived; and they did “flee

to the mountains."

The Christians in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and villages, "in Judea ", availed themselves of the first opportunity for eluding the Roman armies, and fled to the mountain city of Pella, in Perea, where they were preserved from the general destruction which overthrew the Jews. There was no time to spare before the final investment of the guilty city; the man "on the house-top" could "not come down to take anything out of his house", and the man "in the field" could not "return back, to take his clothes." They must flee to the mountains in the greatest haste the moment that they saw "Jerusalem compassed with armies "(Luke 21:20).

19-21. *And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that; your flight in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

It must have been a peculiarly trying time for the women who had to flee from their homes just when they needed quiet and rest. How thoughtful and tender was our pitiful Savior in thus sympathizing with suffering mothers in their hour of need! "Flight... in the winter" or "on the sabbath day" would have been attended with special difficulties; so the disciples were exhorted to "pray" that some other time might be available. The Lord knew exactly when they would be able to escape, yet he bade them pray that their flight might not be in the winter, nor on the Sabbath-day. the wise men of the present day would have said that prayer was useless under such conditions; not so the great Teacher and Example of his praying people; he taught that such a season was the very time for special supplication.

The reason for this injunction was thus stated by the Savior: "For there shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." Read the record written by Josephus of the destruction of Jerusalem, and see how truly our Lord's words were fulfilled. The Jews impiously said, concerning the death of Christ, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Never did any other people invoke such an awful curse upon themselves, and upon no other nation did such a judgment ever fall. We read of Jews crucified till there was no more wood for making crosses; of thousands of the people slaying one another in their fierce faction fights within the city; of so

many of them being sold for slaves that they became a drug in the market, and all but valueless; and of the fearful carnage when the Romans at length entered the doomed capital; and the blood-curdling story exactly bears out the Savior's statement uttered nearly forty years before the terrible events occurred.

22. *And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*

These were the words of the King as well as of the Prophet; and as such, they were both authentic and authoritative. Jesus spoke of what "should be" not only as the Seer who was able to gaze into the future, but as the Sovereign Disposer of all events. He knew what a fiery trial awaited the unbelieving nation, and that "except those days should, be shortened, there should no flesh be saved." If the horrors of the siege were to continue long, the whole race of the Jews would be destroyed. The King had the power to cut short the evil days, and he explained his reason for using that power: "For the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Those who had been hated and persecuted by their own countrymen became the means of preserving them from absolute annihilation. Thus has it often been since those days; and for the sake of his elect the Lord has withheld many judgments, and shortened others. The ungodly owe to the godly more than they know, or would care to own.

23-26. *Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.*

It is a grand thing to have such faith in Christ that, you have none to spare for impostors. It is important not to distribute your faith too widely. Those who believe a little of everything will, in the end, believe nothing of anything. If you exercise full faith in that which is sure and steadfast, "false Christs and false prophets" will not be able to make you their dupes. In one respect, the modern teachers of heresy are more successful than their Judean prototypes, for they do

actually “deceive the very elect”, even though they cannot “shew great signs and wonders.” One of the saddest signs of the times in which we live is the ease with which “the very elect” are deceived by the smooth-tongued “false Christs and false prophets” who abound in our midst. Yet our Savior expressly forewarned his followers against them: “Behold, I have told you before.” Forewarned is forearmed. Let it be so in our case. Our Savior’s expressive command may be fitly applied to the whole system of “modern thought” which is contrary to the inspired Word of God: “Believe it not.”

27. *For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

When HE comes, we shall know who he is, and why he has come. There will be no longer any mystery or secret about “the coming of the Son of man” There will be no need to ask any questions then; no one will make a mistake about his appearing when it actually takes place. “Every eye shall see him.” Christ’s coming will be sudden, startling, universally visible, and terrifying to the ungodly: “as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west.” His first coming to judgment at the destruction of Jerusalem had terrors about it that till then had never been realized on the earth; his last coming will be more dreadful still.

28. *For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*

Judaism had become a “carcase”, dead and corrupt; fit prey for the vultures or carrion-kites of Rome. By-and-by, there will arrive another day, when there will be a dead church in a dead world, and “the eagles” of divine judgment “will be gathered: together” to tear in pieces those whom there shall be none to deliver. The birds of prey gather wherever dead bodies are to be found; and the judgments of Christ will be poured out when the body politic or religious becomes unbearably corrupt.

29, 30. *Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: and*

then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Our Lord appears to have purposely mingled the prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and his own second coming, so that there should be nothing in his words to satisfy idle curiosity, but everything to keep his disciples always on the watch for his appearing. These verses must apply to the coming of the King at the last great day. There may have been a partial fulfilment of them in "the tribulation" that came upon his guilty capital; and the language of the Savior might have been taken, metaphorically, to set forth the wonders in "the heavens" and the woes on "the earth" in connection with that awful judgment; but we must regard Christ's words here as prophetic of the final manifestation of "the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." There will be no further need of "the sun and the moon and the star," when HE, who is brighter than the sun, shines forth in all the glory of his Father and of his holy angels.

Christ's coming will be the source of untold joy to his friends; but it will bring unparalleled sorrow to his foes: "then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn." When Jesus comes, he will find the nations still unsaved, and horror will be their eternal portion.

31. *And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other,*

Our Lord's first concern, when he comes again, will be the security of "his elect." He has gone to prepare a place for them; and when the place is ready, and the time for their glorification has come, "he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

What a contrast between the gathering together of the eagles to devour the rotting carcase and the gathering together of Christ's elect at the great trumpet-summons of his holy angels! May every reader of these lines be in the latter company! Such will look forward with joy to the time of the King's appearing.

32-33. *Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away but my words shall not pass away.*

Our Lord here evidently returns to often made use of its illuminated the subject of the destruction of Jerusalem, and in these words gives his apostles warning concerning the signs of the times. He had recently used the barren fig tree as an object-lesson; he now bids his disciples “learn a parable of the fig tree” and all the trees (Luke 21:31). God’s great book of nature is full of illustrations for those who have eyes to perceive them; and the Lord Jesus, the great Creator, often made use of its illuminated pages in conveying instruction to the minds of his hearers. On this occasion, he used a simple simile from the parable of the fig-tree: “When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh.” They could not mistake so plain a token of the near return of summer; and Jesus would have them read quite as quickly the signs that were to herald the coming judgment on Jerusalem: “So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.” The Revised Version has the words, “Know ye that he is nigh,” the Son of man, the King. His own nation rejected him when he came in mercy; so his next coming would be a time of terrible judgment and retribution to his guilty capital. Oh, that Jews and Gentiles today were wise enough to learn the lesson of that fiery trial, and to seek his face, those wrath they cannot bear!

The King left his followers in no doubt as to when these things should happen: “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled.” It was just about the ordinary limit of a generation when the Roman armies compassed Jerusalem, whose measure of iniquity was then full, and overflowed in misery, agony, distress, and bloodshed such as the world never saw before or since. Jesus was a true Prophet; everything that he foretold was literally fulfilled. He confirmed what he had already said, and what he was about to say, by a solemn affirmation: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” “The Word of the Lord endureth for ever,” and though that Lord appeared in fashion as a man, and was shortly to be crucified as a malefactor, his words would endure when heaven and earth would have

fulfilled the purpose for which he had created them, and passed away.

Christ's promises of pardon are as sure of fulfilment as his prophecies of punishment; no word of his shall ever "pass away."

36. *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angel of heaven, but my Father only.*

There is a manifest change in our Lord's words here, which clearly indicates that they refer to his last great coming to judgment: "But of that day and hour knoweth no man." Some would be prophets have wrested this verse from its evident meaning by saying, "Though we do not know the day and the hour of Christ's coming, we may know the year, the month, and even the week." If this method of "renting the words of Jesus is not blasphemous, it is certainly foolish, and betrays disloyalty to the King. He added that, not only does no man know of that day and hour, but it is hidden from angelic beings also: "No, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." We need not therefore be troubled by idle prophecies of hair-brained fanatics, even if they claim to interpret the Scriptures; for what the angels do not know has not been revealed to them. Even Christ, in his human nature, so voluntarily limited his own capacities that he knew not the time of his Second Advent (Mark 13:32). It is enough for us to know that he will surely come; our great concern should be to be ready for his appearing whenever he shall return.

37-39. *But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

Though the King did not reveal the time of "the coming of the Son of man", he declared plainly that history would repeat itself, and that "that day" would be "as fee days of Noe were." When he comes, he will find many unprepared, even as the antediluvians were when "the flood came, and took them all away." Yet in both cases, sinners will have had ample warning Noah was "a preacher of righteousness" to the men of his day; "and this gospel of the kingdom shall be

preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come "(v. 14). Christ's coming, like the flood, will be sudden, unexpected, universal in its effects, and terrible to the ungodly, although they will be utterly unconcerned: "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day." That which is lawful and right, under other circumstances, becomes a positive evil when it takes the place of preparation for the coming of the Son of man. Woe unto those whose eating and drinking do not include the bread and the water of life; and who marry or are given in marriage, but not to the heavenly Bridegroom! That Dise Irae will be a dreadful day for sinners.

40, 41. *Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left.*

The division between the godly and the ungodly, at the coming of Christ, will be very precise. Companions in labor will be separated for ever in "that day": Then shall two be in the field;" ploughing, sowing, reaping, or resting; "the one shall be taken, and the other left." The believing laborer shall be taken by the angels to join the hosts of the redeemed, while his unbelieving fellow-workman shall be left to the judgment that will swiftly be poured out upon him. "Two women shall be grinding at the mill;" they may be fellow-servants in a rich man's mansion, or they may be mother and daughter or two sisters in a poor man's home; but however closely they may have been attached to one another, if one is saved by grace, and the other is still under the sentence of condemnation, "the one shall be taken, and the other left." This separation will be eternal; there is no hint of any future reunion.

42. *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

This is the practical conclusion of the whole matter. That our Lord is coming, is certain; that his coming may be at any moment, is a matter of faith; and that we are ignorant of the time of his coming, is a matter of fact: "Ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." Christ's words are in the present tense. He does not say, "Ye know not what hour your Lord will come," but, "what hour your Lord doth come", as if to keep us always expecting him; and lest we should not heed his words, he puts the command in plainest language:" Watch therefore." The title that he uses gives additional force to the command to his disciples to watch,

for it is our Lord who is coming quickly.

43, 44. *But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

If the householder has reliable information that a thief is coming, but does not know at what hour he will arrive, he will keep awake all night, waiting for his appearance; but if “the goodman of the house” is told “in what watch the thief” will come, he will be specially on the alert at that time. Every little sound will attract his attention. He thinks he hears someone at the back door; no, the thief is trying to enter by a front window! Wherever he comes, he will find that the master’s ear is listening, the master’s eye is watching, the master’s hand is ready to arrest him; for he had received timely warning of the housebreaker’s coming. Men act thus wisely with regard to burglars; what a pity they are not equally wise in watching for the coming of their Lord! We do not know, we cannot even guess, in what watch of earth’s long night HE will come: “In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” There is the present tense again, “the Son of man cometh,” he is coming; his own words are, “Behold, I am coming quickly.”

Christ’s coming to the world will be like that of the thief, when it is not suspected or expected, and therefore when due preparations for his reception have not been made; but his true followers will not let “that day “overtake them “as a thief “(1 Thessalonians 5:4). ‘They ought ever to be looking for his appearing. Our Lord’s injunction to his disciples ought to have even greater weight with us who live so much nearer to the time of his Second Advent than it had with those to whom he addressed his warning words, “Therefore be ye also ready.” We ought to be as watchful as if we knew that Christ would come tonight; because, although we do not know when he will come, we do know that he may come at any moment. Oh, to be ready for his appearing, watching and waiting for him as servants whose Lord has been long away from them, and who may return at any hour! This will not make us neglect our daily calling; on the contrary, we shall be all the more diligent in attending to our earthly duties because our hearts are at rest about our heavenly treasures.

45, 46. *Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath*

made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

The apostles were “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1), and “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). One great qualification for a steward was that he should be found “faithful” both to “his lord” and to all in the “household” over whom he was “made ruler.” It was needful also that he should be “wise” in his dealings with his fellow-servants; for, notwithstanding the honor put upon him, he was still a “servant”, who must give to his lord an account of his stewardship. These words describe the service of a minister, preaching the truth with all his heart, and seeking “to give meat in due season” to all over whom the Holy Ghost hath made him an overseer. Or they picture a teacher, endeavoring to feed the minds of the young with sound doctrine; or they portray any servant of Christ, whatever his calling may be, doing the work that his Master has appointed him, just as he would wish to do it if he knew that his Lord was coming at that moment to examine it: “Blessed is that whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.” Such a servant of Christ is blessed; he is a happy man to be found by his Lord “so doing.” May our Master find us thus occupied when he cometh!

47. *Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.*

His lord had formerly made him “ruler over his household”, the steward who had charge of all the household servants. His faithful and prudent conduct in that office won for him promotion to a higher post, so that his lord resolved to “make him ruler over all his goods.” Thus is it among the servants of King Jesus, there are rewards for faithful service not of debt, but of grace; not according to the rule of the Law, but according to the discipline of the house of God, and the higher rule of Love.

It should be noted that faithfulness in one form of service is rewarded by further service and increased responsibility. The servant, whose pound gained ten pounds, received authority over ten cities (Luke 19:17).

48-51. *But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord*

delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This man was a “servant “, so that we have here a warning, not to the outside world, but to those who are inside the Church of Christ, and who profess to be servants of God. This is also specially a warning to ministers of the Word, those who are made rulers over God’s household. This man, though a servant, was an “evil servant”; a hypocrite, one who had intruded into an office which he had no right to occupy. His thoughts and words were evil: “If that evil servant shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming.” His conduct towards those put under him was evil: “and shall begin to smite his fellowservant.” His own life was evil: “and to eat and drink with the drunken.” His evildoing would be suddenly cut short by his master’s appearance: “The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of.” Immediate and terrible punishment would be meted out to him: “And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites:” he was one of them, he pretended to be a servant of God when all the while he was a slave of Satan, serving self and sin; let him go to his own company. He was really cut in two before, outwardly he was a follower of Christ, inwardly he served his own lusts; to “cut him asunder” will only be a righteous perpetuation of his own double-faced character. Will that be the end of him? No; “there shall be weeping and: gnashing of teeth.” What a “portion” for one who was numbered amongst God’s servants! As we read of it, let us, in deep humility, remember the solemn injunction of the apostle, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Matthew 25

1. *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.*

According to Oriental custom, the bridegroom is represented as having gone to the house of his bride's father, whence he would conduct his spouse to her future home. The parable opens at the point where some of his professed friends are waiting to join the procession, and go in with him to the marriage-feast. Thus is the nominal Church of Christ waiting for the coming of the Lord. There did not seem to be much difference in the eternal appearance of the "ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." They were all virgins, they all took their lamps, and they all went forth to meet the bridegroom. They all made a profession of attachment to him, which led them to separate themselves from their other companions and acquaintances, that they might go forth to meet him on his wedding-night.

There was, however, a vital and essential difference between them: "Five of them were wise, and five were foolish." Let us fain hope that we are not to gather from our Lord's words that one half of the professing Church is composed of those whom he calls "foolish." Yet our Savior would not have spoken of so great a proportion if there were not really a very large admixture of foolish professors with the wise possessors of the grace of God.

3. *Them that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them:*

They may have thought that, if they had lamps that were similar to those carried by others, it would be sufficient. Perhaps they judged that the secret store of oil, being unseen, was unnecessary. They were willing to carry a lamp in one hand; but to devote the other hand to the care of an oil- flask, was more than they were

willing to do. It is the want of the oil of grace that is the fatal flaw in many a professor's lamp. Many have a name to live, but have not the life of God within their souls. They make a profession of attachment to Christ, but they have not the inward supply of the Spirit of grace to keep it up. There is a glitter or a flash, but there is no permanent light, and there cannot be any, for although they have "lamps", they have "no oil with them."

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

They had oil in their lamps, and oil with their lamps. Lamps are of no use without oil; yet the oil needs the lamp, or it will not be used. Grace should reveal its presence, faith in Christ should be avowed; but it is worse than useless to make a profession of love to Christ, unless there is a secret store of grace by which the external part of religion may be maintained even before the all-searching eye of the King himself. Unless the Spirit of God be in us, indeed, and of a truth, we may for a while make a fair show in the flesh, but the end will be the blackness of darkness for ever.

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

How sadly true it is, that, in the history of Christ's Church, genuine saints and mere professors have often "slumbered and slept" side by side! Those who have the oil of grace are not always wide awake to serve their Master, and watch for his appearing. In the case of even true believers, the delay in Christ's coming causes disappointment, weariness, and lethargy; and his Church falls fast asleep, when she ought to be watching for her Lord. As for the "foolish ", whether self-deceived or hypocrites, there being no true life of God in the soul, after a while their apparent earnestness disappears, and Satan drugs them into a fatal slumber.

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

That midnight cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh," startled all the sleepers. It should be well if we all I thought more of the great truth of our Lord's Second Advent. The oftener it is preached, in due proportion with other revealed doctrines, the more likely will it be to arouse both slumbering possessors and

sleeping professors of love to Christ. As the midnight of this present evil age approaches, there is increasing need for all to be bidden to listen for the clarion cry, “Go ye out to meet him.”

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

The suddenness of the alarm made them all start to their feet, and begin to examine and trim their lamps. They could not go to meet the bridegroom without carrying a light; that was an essential part of their preparation for joining the King’s marriage procession. Those virgins who had “oil in their vessels with their lamps” soon finished their trimming, and were ready to start; but those who had “lamps” but “no oil” were unable to perform the necessary trimming. It is a pity that any should have to be trimming their lamps when they come to die, or when the sign of the Son of man appears in the heaven; but if that work is attempted without the Spirit or the grace of God, it will be an eternal failure.

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

They now began to value what they had aforetime despised; they had been so foolish as to think that oil was unnecessary, now they saw that it was the one thing needful. Hence their request to their wiser companions: “Give us of your oil.” They gave a dreadful reason for their request: “for our lamps are gone out,” or, going out; the dry wick flickered a while, and then died out in darkness, like the snuff of a candle.

Those are terrible words, “our lamps are gone out.” It is worse to have a lamp that has gone out than never to have had a lamp at all. “Our lamps are gone out.” The foolish virgins seemed to say, “We thought everything was ready for tonight, we even gloried in our lamps, we promised ourselves a bright future, we thought all was well for our share in the marriage-supper; but our lamps are gone out, and we have no oil with which to supply them.” May no reader of this page ever have to utter this bitter lament!

Those who are putting of their repentance till their dying hour are like these foolish virgins; their folly has reached its utmost height. When the death-sweat lies cold on the brow, the neglected oil of grace will be valued. Then will come

the despairing cry “Send for a minister to pray for me, get in some Christian people to see what they can do for me.”

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,*

No believer has more grace than he needs: “the wise” virgins had no oil to give away. They gave the best advice they could under the circumstances, although it was of no avail: “Go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.” There is a proper place where the oil can be bought at the right time: we are bidden to “buy the truth,” grace is sold in God’s market on gospel terms, “without money, and without price;” but when the midnight cry is heard, the day of grace has closed, and buying and selling are over for ever.

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.*

Undoubtedly, there are death-bed repentances; but it is to be feared that, in the great majority of cases, people who wake up so late to a true conviction of their condition will find that, while they go to buy the long-despised grace, “the bridegroom” will come. The poor head may be so distracted with pain that the mind may not be able to catch the idea of what faith in Christ is; mental capacity may wholly fail in that dread hour. The risk is so great that none but the fatally foolish will postpone till then the preparation for the King’s coming.

“They that were ready went in with him to the marriage:” their readiness consisted in having lighted lamps, or flaming torches; our preparation for death or Christ’s coming, is the possession of grace in the heart. “And the door was shut:” when that door is once shut, it will never be opened. There are some who dote and dream about an opening of that door, after death, for those who have died impenitent; but there is nothing in the Scriptures to warrant such an expectation. Any “larger hope” than that revealed in the Word of God, is a delusion and a snare.

11, 12. *Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, lord, lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

“The other virgins” were not “ready” when the bridegroom came; and there is no hint in the parable that they were any more ready when they came and clamored at his closed door, “Lord, lord, open to us.’ “We came to meet thee, we carried lamps, we were with the other virgins; Lord, Lord, open to us! “His answer tolled the knell of any vain hope of admission that they might have cherished: “Verily, I say unto you, I know you not.” “If any man loveth God, the same is known of him.” (1 Corinthians 8:3, R.V.) The Good Shepherd says, “I know mine own, and mine own know me.” (John 10:14, R.V.) Those whom Jesus Christ knows in this sense, he loves; and they love him because he has first loved them. The foolish virgins had professed to be the bridegroom’s friends, yet they were proved to be not even his acquaintances. May none of us ever hear from the blessed lips of the heavenly Bridegrooom that terrible death-sentence, “I know you not”!

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

Our Lord again enjoins upon his followers the duty of watchfulness, as in chapter 24:42; and repeats, in a slightly-altered form, the reason previously given: “For ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” It is idle to say that we may find out the year, if not the day and hour, of Christ’s coming. The time of the end is hidden, and shall not be known until sudden1;s he shall appear “in the clouds of heaven in power and great glory.” It should be our one great concern to be sure that we shall be ready to meet him whenever he may come.

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

Our Savior had been speaking of himself as the heavenly Bridegroom; now he compares himself to “a man travelling into a far country.” The word “travelling” suggests that our Lord has only gone away for a season and that he will return when his purpose in going into the “far country” is accomplished. When he went

back from earth to heaven, it was a long journey; but he did not leave his servants without needful supplies during his absence. He “called his own servants”, his bond-servants, his household servitors; “and delivered unto them his goods.” The servants were his, and the goods also were his; his slaves could not claim as their own either their persons or their possessions; all belonged to their lord, and were to be used for him.

He did not entrust to all the same quantity of goods: “Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability.” He was the judge of the ability of each of his servants, and he made no mistake in his allotment of the talents to them. We may rest assured, if we are the Lord’s servants, that he has bestowed upon us as many talents as we can rightly use, and quite as many as we shall be able to account for when he returns. The all-important matter for us is to be faithful to the trust committed to us.

“And straightway took his journey: “our Lord knew all that was to happen before he left the earth, — his passion, crucifixion, and resurrection; but he calmly talked of it as a man might speak of his preparations for travelling into a foreign country. He has gone, and his servants are left behind to make the best use they can of his ascension- gifts while he is absent.

This parable, like that of the ten virgins, has to do with real and nominal Christians, with all who are or who profess to be the servants of Christ. The “talents” are anything and everything that our Lord has given to us for use here as his stewards.

16-18. *Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.*

It is very significant that our Savior said that “he that had received one” talent “went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.” Many who have “five talents” or “two” have not “traded with the same,” and so gained “other five” or “other two”; but Jesus knew that it was the servant with one talent who was most exposed to the temptation to do nothing because he could only do little. There are perils connected with the possession of five talents, or two; but the man who has only one talent is in equal if not greater danger. Let us all remember that, as

it is a sin to hide one talent in the earth, it is a greater sin to hide two or five talents. It was “his lord’s money” that the slothful servant hid. It would have been wrong to bury what belonged to himself; but he was doubly blameworthy in hiding that which had been entrusted to him by his lord, instead of trading with it so as to increase it. Are any of us thus sinning against our Savior?

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

There is a reckoning-day coming, even though “a long time “may elapse before “the lord of those servants cometh.” Jesus is coming back from the far country whither he has gone; his own word is, “Behold, I come quickly.” We must not leave this great fact out of our reckoning; and as his stewards, we must be prepared at any moment for him to come and reckon with us as to the talents with which he has endowed each of his servants.

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

Have all of us, who “received five talents” from our Lord, “gained beside them five talents more”? I trow not. Have we double the grace we had at first? Twice the tact with which we began our service for God? Twofold adaptation to the work he has given us to do? It was so with this servant; and therefore, his lord commended and rewarded him. There was no proportion between his service and its reward: “Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.” He who is faithful to his Lord shall have greater opportunities of proving his loyalty and devotion in a higher sphere; and in addition, he shall share the bliss of his Lord’s return: “Enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” This is not the servant’s portion, but the Master’s portion shared with his faithful servants. This will be the consummation of all heavenly delights; not so much that we shall have a joy of our own as that we shall enter into the joy of our Lord.

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

This servant's commendation and reward are exactly the same as those given to his more highly privileged brother; as if our Savior would teach us that it is not the number of our talents, but the use we make of them, that is the essential matter. He does not expect as much from the man with two talents as from the one to whom he has given five; what he does expect is that they should both be faithful over the few things he has committed to their care. It was so with the two servants mentioned in the parable. The second had doubled the capital received from his lord, even as the first had done with his larger amount of trust-money; therefore they were equally praised and blessed.

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

At the day of reckoning, the unfaithful as well as the faithful have to give account of their stewardship. This man's words were self-contradictory, and his excuse was self-condemnatory. He said that he know that his lord was a hard man, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strawed, yet he confessed that the talent he brought back had been given to him by this master whom he represented as severe and unreasonable. He also admitted that it was his lord's money that he had hidden in the earth: "thy talent." It was entrusted to him, and yet even the servant owned that it did not belong to him: "Lo, there thou hast that is thine." "I have not made any addition to thy talent; but I have not lost it, nor given it away; I have brought it back, lo, there it is." He seemed to speak as though this was all that could be rightly expected of him; yet he was evidently not satisfied with himself, for he said, "I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." See how fear may become the mother of presumption. Faith in God begets holy fear; but servile fear is the parent of

doubt, which in its turn has a family of unbelieving rebels.

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

"His" took the "wicked And slothful servant" on his own ground, and condemned him out of his own mouth. The master did not mean to admit that he was such a one as he had been called by the "malicious and lazy slave", as the original might be literally rendered; but supposing the servant's words had been true, what ought he to have done? If he was afraid to trade with his lord's talent on his own responsibility, he might have taken it to the bankers, who would at least have kept it secure, and added interest to it while it was deposited with them.

If we cannot trade directly and personally on our Lord's account, if we have not the skill or the tact to manage a society or an enterprise for him, we may at least contribute to what others are doing, and join our capital to theirs, so that, by some means, our Master may have the interest to which he is entitled. His talent must not be buried in the earth; but must be invested wherever it will bring to him the best return at his coming.

28-30. *Take therefore the talent from him, and give it to him which hath ten talents. 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. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

The servant who had gained five talents to his lord's five was allowed to keep them all, for his master spoke of "him which has ten talents." The unused talent of the slothful servant was also given to him, for he who uses well that which is entrusted to him shall receive more. He who has faith shall have more faith. He who has a taste for divine things shall develop a greater appetite for them He who has some understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom shall understand

them more fully: “For unto every one that hath shall be given and he shall have abundance.”

To lose the talent that had remained idle, was only a small part of the doom of “the unprofitable servant.” His lord ordered him to be “cast into outer darkness “, and his punishment is indicated by that oft-repeated refrain of our Savior’s revelation of the horrors that await lost souls: “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” If we give any description of the world to come which is at all terrible, we are supposed to have borrowed it from Dante or Milton; but the most awful and harrowing descriptions of hell that ever fell from human lips do not exceed the language of the loving Christ himself. He is the true lover of men who faithfully warns them concerning the eternal woe that awaits the impenitent; while he who paints the miseries of hell as though they were but trifling is seeking to murder men’s souls under the pretence. of friendship.

Here we have the King’s own description of the Day of Judgment; and in the solemn silence of our spirits we may well put off our shoes from our feet as we draw nigh to this holy ground.

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:*

Our Savior had a wonderful series of contrasts passing before his eye as he uttered this sublime prophecy.

Within three days he was to be crucified; ;yet he spoke of the time “When the Son of man shall come in his glory.” He had with him a little company of disciples, one of whom would betray him, another would deny him, and all would forsake him; yet by faith he saw the heavenly retinue that would attend him at his coming: “and all the holy angels with him.” Wearied and worn with his labors, and saddened because of the hardness of men’s hearts and the impending doom of Jerusalem, he sat on the slope of the Mount of Olives; but his thoughts were projected across the ages as he told his hearers of the glorious throne he would occupy in the day when he should return as the Royal and Universal Judge of mankind: “Then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.” The great white throne shall be set on high, all pure and lustrous, bright and clear as a polished mirror, in which every man shall see himself and his sins reflected; and on that throne shall sit “the Son of man.” Behind the Kingly Judge, “all the

holy angels" shall be ranged, rank on rank, an innumerable and glorious body-guard, to grace the court of their enthroned Lord on the day of the last great assize; and, at his bidding, to remove from his presence all whom he shall condemn.

32, 33. *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: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.*

In the last great day of the Lord, all nations that have ever existed on the face of the globe shall be gathered before the judgment-seat of Christ. The earth, which is now becoming more and more one vast graveyard or channel-house, shall yield up her dead; and the sea itself, transformed into a solid pavement, shall bear upon its bosom the millions who lie hidden in its gloomy caverns. All mankind will be assembled before their Judge: "and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall fail because of him." At first they will be gathered together in one heterogeneous mass; but the myriad multitude will speedily be divided into two companies: "and he shall separate them one from another." The King will be the divider in that dread day. How he will separate them, no one can tell, except that it will be "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." Not one goat will be left among the sheep, nor one sheep with the goats. The division will be very close and personal: "one from another." They will not be separated into nations, nor even into families; but each individual will be allotted his or her proper place among the sheep or among the goats.

"And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left." There will be only two companies, one on the right hand of the Judge, and the other on his left. The Lord Jesus Christ "shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing "; and all who will be summoned before his dread tribunal will be either alive from the dead, or still dead in trespasses and sins. There will be no middle company in that day, as in God's sight there is no third class even now. All our names are either in the Lamb's Book of Life or in the Judge's Book of Death.

Some have taught that the judgment here foretold is that of the professing Church, and not of the whole world. There may be some ground for their belief;

yet it seems impossible to apply the full meaning of our Savior's majestic words to any scene except the general judgment of the whole human race.

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:*

Turning first to the chosen company on his right hand, the "great multitude, which no man could number," the King will say to them, "Come." They had accepted his previous invitation, "Come unto me; "now he gives them another and a more glorious "Come," which was, however, included in the former one; for when he said, "I will give you rest," heaven itself was promised to them. The King calls his loved ones by a choice name: "ye blessed of my Father." We shall not know what bliss that title implies until we hear it from our Savior's lips; and even then we shall only begin to understand what we shall continue to enjoy throughout eternity.

All true believers are joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, so the King will next say to them, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The "inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," is the inalienable right of all who are made kings and priests unto God; and that which has been prepared for them from the foundation of the world must be possessed by them when the world itself has answered the end of its creation, and has been burned up.

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

The King dwells with great delight upon the details of his servants' kindnesses to himself. Are we, then, after all, to be saved by our works? By no means. Yet are our works the evidences of our being saved. If our actions are such as Christ will commend at the day of judgment, they prove that we are saved by grace, and that the Holy Spirit has wrought effectually in us, and through us. The services mentioned by the King were all rendered to himself: "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: naked and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." There is no mention of what the righteous had said, or of what profession of love to Christ they had made; the commendation was for what the King declared they had actually done by way of ministering unto him.

37-39. *Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?*

They will bashfully disclaim the praise pronounced by the King. They had no idea that there was anything meritorious in what they had done; they never dreamed of being rewarded for it. When the saints stand before the judgment seat, the bare thought of there being any excellence in what they have done will be new to them, for they have formed a very lowly estimate of their own performances. They fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick, for Christ's sake, because it was the sweetest thing in the world to do anything for Jesus. They did it because they delighted to do it, because they could not help doing it, because their new nature impelled them to it.

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.*

Christ has much more to do with his brethren's sorrow than we sometimes think. Are they hungry? He puts it, "I was an hungred." Do they thirst? He says, "I was thirsty." The sympathy of Christ is continuous, and all adown the ages he will perpetually incarnate himself in the suffering bodies of his tried and afflicted people. Hence the opportunity of doing him service so long as we are here.

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.*

Every word in the King's sentence upon those on his left hand will strike terror

into their hearts. “Depart from me:” to be banished from Christ’s presence, is hell. “Ye cursed:” they could not plead that they had either kept the Law or obeyed the Gospel; they were indeed doubly cursed. They were bidden to depart “into ever lasting fire, prepared: for the devil and, his angels.” They had joined the devil in refusing allegiance to the Lord; so it was but right that, imitating his rebellion, they should share his punishment.

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

Two little words, “no” and “not” explain the difference between their conduct and that of the righteous. To those on his right hand, the King will say, “I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat,” but to those on his left hand, he will say, “Ye gave me no meat.” This omission on their part was no small matter; it was fatal, and it was visited with the eternal death-sentence, “Depart from me.” Men may think lightly now of their want of love to Christ, and their neglect to care for his poor brethren, but their conduct will appear in another light in the blaze of the last great day. Yet, even then, some will try to justify themselves.

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.*

What a deceiver is sin! How presumptuous, that even in the presence of the Omniscient Judge, it denies its own real character; and makes its votaries pretend to have attained to the divine standard of holiness!

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

Our Lord does not mean to teach that men will be condemned because they have not been charitable to the poor and needy, or that they will be saved if they are generous and openhanded. That would indeed be salvation by works, to be

boasted of to all eternity. He does mean that only those who produce such fruit as this prove that “the root of the matter” is in them; by ministering to his poor brethren, out of love to him, they show that they are the subjects of that distinguishing grace which makes them differ from others. All our future depends upon our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

“Everlasting” and “eternal “are different translations of the same Greek word. The “punishment “is of the same duration as the “life.” The one is no more temporary or terminable than the other. In heaven “the righteous” will be for ever anticipating future bliss while enjoying present perfect happiness; and in hell, the unrighteous will be ever looking forward to “the wrath to come “while enduring what our Savior here describes as “everlasting punishment “in” everlasting fire “(v. 41). Between heaven and hell there is a great gulf fixed, an awful abyss that cannot be crossed, so that the separation between the sheep and the goats will be eternal and unalterable. God grant that none of us may be on the wrong side of that great gulf!

Matthew 26

1. *And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is the fears of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified.*

Our Lord, having finished all these sayings about the destruction of Jerusalem, his own Second Advent, and the great Day of Judgment, brought back the thoughts of his disciples to his own death. He had often foretold what the end of his life would be; he now states definitely when it would be: “Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover.” In a sense that they probably did not fully comprehend, the passover, the one great passover, was about to be observed. After two days, the Paschal Lamb of God, “Christ our passover”, would be slain. His betrayal was so certain and so near, that it might be spoken of as already accomplished: “the Son of man, is betrayed to be crucified.” The time for Christ to be delivered up into the hands of sinners had almost arrived; and when once his enemies had him in their power, they would never rest until he was crucified.

3-5. *Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.*

While Jesus was prophesying, his enemies were plotting. Thus was fulfilled Psalm 2:2, “The rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed.” Their aim was that they might kill him; but they consulted how they might take Jesus by subtilty. They decided not to arrest him “during the feast “(R.V.); yet the evil deed was to be postponed, not from any religious regard for the passover, but “lest there be an uproar among the people.” Their plan was

contrary to Christ's prophecy; but the event proved that he was right and they were wrong, for he was crucified at the time he foretold.

6, 7. *Now when Jesus was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, he sat at meat.*

We do not know who Simon the leper was, nor whether this woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus, though I believe she was the one who came to Jesus, having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. The beauty of this woman's act consisted in this, that it was all for Christ. All who wore in the house could perceive and enjoy the perfume of the precious ointment; but the anointing was for Jesus only.

8, 9. *But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.*

When you do the best you can do, from the purest motives, and your Lord accepts your service, do not expect that your brethren will approve all your actions. If you do, you will be greatly disappointed. There was never a more beautiful proof of love to Christ than this anointing at Bethany; yet the disciples found fault with it: they had indignation, saying, "To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor." According to John's account, it was Judas who asked, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? "The same evangelist gives the reason for the traitor's question, "This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." The complaint having been started by Judas, others of the disciples joined in it. If this devoted and enthusiastic woman had waited for the advice of these prudent people, she would neither have sold the ointment, nor poured it out. She did well to take counsel with her own loving heart, and then to pour the precious nard upon that dear head which was so soon to be crowned with thorns. She thus showed that there was, at least, one heart in the world that thought nothing was too good for her Lord! and that the best of the best ought to be given to him. May she have many imitators in every age until Jesus comes

again!

10. *When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman she hath wrought a good work upon me.*

She kind been very happy in the act; probably it was the happiest hour in all her life when she gave this costly gift to the Lord she loved so well. But a cloud passed over her bright face as the whispered complaints reached her ear. Jesus perceived that the murmuring of the disciples troubled the woman, so he rebuked them, and commended her: “Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.” She did something we cannot do, for Christ is not now here in person, to be anointed by those who love him as this woman did. We can perform good works upon others for his sake; and he will accept them as though they were done unto himself.

11. *For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.*

Our Lord always cared for the poor; he was himself poor, he was the poor people’s Preacher, he fed the hungry poor, and healed the sick poor. He would always have his people show their love to him by caring for the poor; but he had reached the one occasion in his life when it was seemly that something should be done specially for himself, and this woman, by the intuition of love, did that very thing. Oh, that we might all love Christ as intensely as she did!

12, 13. *For in that she hath poured this ointment my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also, this that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.*

She probably did not know all that her action meant when she anointed her Lord for his burial. The consequences of the simplest action done for Christ may be much greater than we think. Go thou, my sister, and do what God bids thee; and it shall be seen that thou hast done far more than thou knowest. Obey the holy impulse within thy spirit, my brother; and thou mayest do ten thousand I times more than thou hast ever I imagined to be possible.

This woman's outburst of affection, this simple-hearted act of love to Christ himself, is one of those things which are to live as long as the gospel lives. The aroma of this loving deed is to abide as long as the world itself endures.

14-16. *Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.*

What a contrast to the incident we have just been considering! The anointing of Jesus is to be the theme of admiration wherever the gospel is preached; but his betrayal by Judas will be a subject for execration to all eternity. It was one of the twelve, who went unto the chief priests, to bargain for the price of his Lord s betrayal. He did not even mention Christ's name in his infamous question, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?", "The amount agreed upon, thirty pieces of silver, was the price of a slave; and showed how little value the chief priests set upon Jesus, and also revealed the greed of Judas in selling his master for so small a sum. Yet many have sold Jesus for a less price than Judas received; a smile or a sneer has been sufficient to induce them to betray their Lord.

Let us, who have been redeemed with Christ's precious blood, set high store by him, think much of him, and praise him much. As we remember, with shame and sorrow, these thirty pieces of silver, let us never undervalue him, or forget the priceless preciousness of him who was reckoned as worth no more than a slave.

17, 18. *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, unto the City to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.*

How truly royal was Jesus of Nazareth even in his humiliation! He had no home of his own wherein he could "Keep the passover "with his disciples; he was soon to be put to a public and shameful death; yet he had only to send two of his disciples "into the city to such a man", and the guest - chamber, furnished and

prepared, was at once placed at his disposal. He did not take the room by arbitrary force, as an earthly monarch might have done; but he obtained it by the diviner compulsion of almighty love. Even in his lowest estate, our Lord Jesus had the hearts of all men beneath his control. What power he has now that he reigns in glory!

19. *And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.*

If Christ's disciples always loyally did as Jesus appointed them, they would always speed well on his errands. There are many more people in the world ready to yield to Christ than some of us think. If we would only go to them as Peter and John went to this man in Jerusalem, and say to them what "the Master saith", we should find that their hearts would be opened to receive Christ even as this man's house was willingly yielded up at our Lord's request.

20, 21. *Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*

Our Lord remained in seclusion until the evening, and then went to the appointed place, and sat down, or rather, reclined at the paschal table, with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." This was a most unpleasant thought to bring to a feast, yet it was most appropriate to the passover, for God's commandment to Moses concerning the first paschal lamb was, "With bitter herbs they shall eat it." This was a painful reflection for our Lord, and also for his twelve chosen companions: "One of you", and his eyes would glance round the table as he said it, "One of you shall betray me."

22. *And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?*

That short sentence fell like a bombshell among the Savior's body-guard. It startled them; they had all made great professions of affection for him, and, for the most part, those professions were true. And they were exceeding sorrowful:

and well they might be. Such a revelation was enough to produce the deepest emotions of sorrow and sadness. It is a beautiful trait in the character of the disciples that they did not suspect one another, but every one of them enquired, almost incredulously, as the form of the question implies, “Lord, is it I? “No one said, “Lord, is it Judas? “Perhaps no one of the eleven thought that Judas was base enough to betray the Lord who had given him an honorable place among his apostles.

We cannot do any good by suspecting our brethren; but we may do great service by suspecting, ourselves. Self-suspicion is near akin to humility.

23, 24. *And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of arm goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

A man may get very near to Christ, ay, may dip his hand in the same dish with the Savior, and yet betray him. We may be high in office, and may apparently be very useful, as Judas was; yet we may betray Christ.

We learn from our Lord’s words that divine decrees do not deprive a sinful action of its guilt: “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed.” His criminality is just as great as though there had been no “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” “It had, been good for that man if he had not been borne.” The doom of Judas is worse than non-existence. To have consorted with Christ as he had done, and then to deliver him into the hands of his enemies, sealed the traitor’s eternal destiny.

25. *Then Judas, which betrayed him answered and said, Master is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said.*

Judas appears to have been the last of the twelve to ask the question, “Is it I?” Those who are the last to suspect themselves are usually those who ought to be the first to exercise self-suspicion. Judas did not address Christ as “Lord”, as the other disciples had done; but called him Rabbi, “Master”. Otherwise, his question was like that of his eleven companions; but he received from Christ an

answer that was given to no one else: He said unto him thou hast said." Probably the reply reached his ear alone, and if he had not been a hopeless reprobate, this unmasking of his traitorous design might have driven him to repentance; but there was nothing in his heart to respond to Christ's voice. He had sold himself to Satan before he sold his Lord.

26-28. *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

The Jewish passover was made to melt into the Lord's supper, as the stars of the morning dissolve into the light of the sun. As they were eating, while the paschal supper was proceeding, Jesus instituted the new memorial which is to be observed until he comes again How simple was the whole ceremony! Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Christ could not have meant that the bread was his body, for his body was reclining by the table; but he intended that broken bread to represent his body which was about to be broken on the cross. Then followed the second memorial, the cup, filled with "the fruit of the vine", of which Christ said, "Drink ye all of it." There is no trace here of any altar or priest; there is nothing about the elevation or adoration of the host; there is no resemblance between the Lord's supper and the Romish mass. Let us keep strictly to the letter and spirit of God's Word in everything; for, if one adds a little, another will add more, and if one alters one point, I and another alters another point, there is no telling how far we shall get from the truth.

The disciples had been reminded of their own liability to sin; now their Savior gives them a personal pledge of the pardon of sin, according to Mark's record of his words, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

29. *But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

Thus Jesus took the great Nazarite vow never to drink of the fruit of the vine till he should drink it new with his disciples in his Father's kingdom. He will keep his tryst with all his followers, and they with him shall hold high festival for ever.

30. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

Was it not truly brave of our dear Lord to sing under such circumstances? He was going forth to his last dread conflict, to Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Golgotha; yet he went with a song on his lips. He must have led the singing, for the disciples were too sad to start the hallel with which the paschal feast closed: And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then came that desperate struggle in which the great Captain of our salvation wrestled even to a bloody sweat, and prevailed.

31, 32. *Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.*

Observe our Lord's habit of quoting Scripture. He was able to speak words of infallible truth, yet he fell back upon the Inspired Record in the Old Testament. His quotation from Zechariah does not seem to have been really. necessary, but it was most appropriate to his prophecy to his disciples: "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered! abroad." Jesus was the Shepherd who was about to be smitten, and he foretold the scattering of the sheep. Even those leaders of the flock that had been first chosen by Christ, and kind been most with him, would stumble and fall away from him on that dread night; but the Shepherd would not lose them, there would be a reunion between him and his sheep: "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." Once again he would resume, for a little while, the character of their Shepherd-King, and with them he would revisit some of their old haunts in Galilee, ere he ascended to his heavenly home. "I will go before you," suggests the idea of the Good Shepherd leading his flock after the Eastern manner. Happy are his sheep in having such a

Leader, and blessed are they in following him whithersoever he goeth.

33. *Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.*

This was a very presumptuous speech, not only because of the self-confidence it betrayed, but also because it was a flat contradiction of the Master's declaration. Jesus said, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night; "but Peter thought he knew better than Christ, so he answered, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." No doubt these words were spoken from his heart; but "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Peter must have been amazed, the next morning, as he discovered the deceitfulness and wickedness of his own heart, as manifested in his triple denial of his Lord.

He who thinks himself so much stronger than his brethren, is the very man who will prove to be weaker than any of them, as did Peter, not many hours after his boast was uttered.

34. *Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.*

Jesus now tells his boastful disciple that, before the next morning's cock-crowing, he will thrice deny his Lord Not only would he stumble and fall with his fellow-disciples, but he would go beyond them all in his repeated denials of that dear Master whom he professed to love with intenser affection than even John possessed. Peter declared that he would remain true to Christ if he were the only faithful friend left; Jesus foretold that, of all the twelve, only Judas would exceed the boaster in wickedness.

35. *Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.*

Here again Peter contradicts his Master straight to his face. It was a pity that he should have boasted once after his Lord's plain prophecy that all the disciples would that night be offended because of him; but it was shameful that Peter

should repeat his self-confident declaration in the teeth of Christ's express prediction concerning him. He was not alone in his utterance, for likewise also said all the disciples. They all felt that under no circumstances could they deny their Lord. We have no record of the denial of Christ by the other ten apostles, although they all forsook him and fled, and thus practically disowned him. Remembering all that they had seen and heard of him, and especially bearing in mind his most recent discourses, the communion in the upper room, and his wondrous intercessory prayer on their behalf, we are not surprised that they felt themselves bound to him for ever. But, alas! Not withstanding their protests, the King s prophecy was completely fulfilled, for that night they were all "offended", or "caused to stumble" (R.V. margin), and Peter thrice denied his Lord.

Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord's life on earth. This is a mystery like that which Moses saw when the bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful, heart-broken meditation, more than for human language. May the Holy Spirit graciously reveal to us all that be can be permitted to see of the King beneath the olive-trees in the garden of Gethsemane!

36. *Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciple, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.*

Our Lord directed eight of his disciples to keep watch either outside or near the entrance of Gethsemane, "the olive-press." This garden had been Christ's favorite place for private prayer, and it was well selected as the scene of his last agonizing supplication.

37, 38. *And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death:tarry ye here, and watch with me.*

The three disciples who had been with him on the Mount of Transfiguration were privileged to be nearer to him than the rest of their brethren; but even they must not be actually with him. His sorrow was so great that he must bear it alone; and there was also that Scripture to be fulfilled, "I have trodden the

winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me." Yet would he have his three choicest companions near him, that he might derive such slight solace from their presence as they could convey to him. They had never before seen their Lord overwhelmed with Atlantic billows of sorrow like those that rolled in upon him as he began to be sorrowful and very heavenly. He was bowed down as if an enormous weight rested on his soul, as indeed it did. 'This was the soul travail, the soul-offering for sin, which was completed on the cross; and well might he say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." The sorrow of his soul was the very soul of his sorrow; his soul was full of sorrow, until he seemed to reach the utmost limit of endurance, and to be at the very date of death. In such dire distress he needed faithful friends at hand, so he said to Peter, James, and John, "Tarry ye here, and watch with me." He must bear alone the awful burden of his people's sin; but his disciples might show their sympathy with him by watching at a respectful distance, and adding their poor prayers to his mighty wrestlings. Alas! they did not prize the privilege Christ gave them: have not we been too much like them when our Savior has bidden us watch with him?

39. *And he went a little farther, and fell on his, face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

Was he heard? Yes, verily, and. especially in that which was the very pith and marrow of his prayer: "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." This was the vital part of his petition, its true essence; for much as his human nature shrank from the "cup", still more did he shrink from any thought of acting contrary to his Father's will. Christ's sense of sonship was clear and undimmed even in that dark hour, for he began his prayer with the filial utterance, "O my father."

40. *And he cometh unto the disciples and findeth them asleep and saith unto Peter. What could ye not watch with me one hour?*

We cannot tell how long he had been wrestling alone in prayer; but it was long enough for the disciples to fall asleep. Peter had constituted himself the spokesman of the company, therefore to him our Lord addressed his gentle rebuke, which was meant also for his companions: "What, could ye, not catch with me one hour?" According to Mark 14:37, the question was put personally to

Peter, “Simon, sleepest thou?” It was bad enough for James and John to be slumbering instead of watching; but after all Peter’s boasting, it seemed worse in his case. He who had made the loudest protestations of devotion deserved to be the most blamed for his unfaithfulness.

41. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak..*

It was truly kind on Christ’s part to find an excuse for his weak and weary disciples; it was just like him to say anything that he could in their praise even though they had slept when they ought to have watched. Yet he repeated the command, “Watch” for that was the special duty of the hour; and he added, “and pray,” for prayer would help them to watch, and watching would aid them in praying. Watching and praying were enjoined for a special purpose: “that ye enter not into temptation.” He knew what sore temptations were about to assail them, so he would have them doubly armed by—

“Watching unto prayer.”

42. *He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.*

These calm, simple words scarcely convey to our minds a full idea of the intense agony under which they were uttered. Luke mentions that our Savior, in his second supplication, “prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.” The tension upon his whole frame became so great that his life seemed oozing away through every pore of his body; and he was so weak and faint, through the terrible strain, that he might well fear that his human nature would sink under the awful trial, and that he would die before his time. Yet even then he recognized his sonship: “O my Father!” and he absolutely surrendered himself to his Father’s will: “Thy will be done.”

43, 44. *And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third*

time, saying the same words.

Great sorrow produces different results in different persons. In the Savior's case, it aroused him to an awful agony of earnestness in prayer; in the disciples' case, it sent them to sleep. Luke says that they were "sleeping for sorrow." Their Master might find an excuse for their neglect; but oh! how they would blame themselves afterwards for missing that last opportunity of watching with their wrestling Lord! As he could get no comfort from them, he left them, and went away again, and prayed: the third time, saying the same words. Those who teach that we should pray but once, and not repeat the petition that we present to the Lord, cannot quote our Savior's example in support of their theory, for thrice on that dread night he offered the same supplication, and oven used the same language. Paul, also, like his Master, "besought the Lord thrice" that the "thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan," might depart from him.

45, 46. *Then cometh he to his disciples and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.*

I do not think Jesus was speaking ironically when he said, "Sleep on now, and take your rest:" but that he allowed them to take a little sleep while he sat by, and watched. Not long did he sit, or did they sleep; for through the olives he could see the glare of the approaching torches, and the stillness of the night was broken by the tramping and shouting of the rabble throng that had come to arrest him. He gently wakened his drowsy disciples by saying, "Rise, let us be going:" adding words that must have struck terror to their sorrowing hearts: "Behold, he is at hand that doth betray me" The crushing in "the olive-press" was over. The long looked-for "hour" of betrayal had come; and Jesus went calmly forward, divinely strengthened to meet the terrible trials that yet awaited him ere he could fully accomplish the redemption of his chosen people.

47-49. *And while he yet spake, lo, Judas one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast.*

And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him.

It is a remarkable fact that we do not read, in the New Testament, that any one of the twelve, except Judas ever kissed Jesus. It seems as if the most impudent familiarity was very near akin to dastardly treachery. This sign of Judas was typical of the way in which Jesus is generally betrayed!. When men intend to undermine the inspiration of the Scriptures, how do they begin their books? Why, always with a declaration that they wish to promote the truth of Christ! Christ's name is often slandered by those who make a loud profession of attachment to him, and then sin foully as the chief of transgressors. There is the Judas-kiss first, and the betrayal afterwards. Thus Judas said, "Hail, master" and kissed him much (R.V. margin); betraying him by the act that ought to have been the token of firmest friendship.

50. *And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.*

The meek and lowly Jesus spake not as any mere man might have done under such circumstances. He did not address Judas as, "Wretch! "or, "Miscreant!" but his first word, after receiving the traitor's kiss, was, "Friend!" He did not denounce him as the vilest of mankind, but quietly said, "Wherefore art thou come?" or, "Do that for which thou art come." (R.V.) Right royally did our King behave in that trying hour. Then came they, and, laid hands on Jesus, and took him. He offered no resistance, although the whole multitude would have been powerless to seize him unless he had been willing to be taken. They came to take him, so he shielded his disciples from arrest while he yielded up himself to his captors, saying, "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." Jesus was always thoughtful of others; he was so in the garden, and even when hanging on the cross.

51, 52. *And behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him. Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.*

A good man s hand is never more out of place than when it is on the sword-hilt; yet there is always a tendency, even among Christians, to draw the sword from its scabbard. It would have been far better if Peter's hands had been clasped in prayer. That act of cutting off the ear of Malchus helped to identify him as one who was with Christ in the garden, and directly led to one of his denials of his Lord (John 8:26, 27). The sword never helps to establish Christ's kingdom; all that is ever done by it will have to be undone. Brute force will throw down what brute force has built up.

53, 54. *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*

How royally our King speaks! He was the true Master of the situation. He had but to pray to his Father, and "more than twelve legions of angels "would come flashing down from the court of heaven. Each timid disciple might have found himself captain of an angelic legion, while their Lord might have had as many more as he chose. There was, however, one difficulty in the way: "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" Jesus thought more of fulfilling the Scriptures than of being delivered from the hands of wicked men. Neither Jewish bands nor Roman ropes could have held him captive if he had not been under the bond of a. mightier force, even that eternal covenant into which he and entered on behalf of his people.

55. *In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me..*

Luke says that this question was put to "the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders." Yet even to them Jesus only addressed a mild expostulation, instead of the terrible denunciation that their conduct deserved. It did seem a great farce for multitudes with swords and stares to go out from Jerusalem, at midnight, to arrest "the Man of Sorrows", who would not allow one of his followers to draw a sword in his defence. Yet even his foes knew that he possessed extraordinary power if he only chose to exert it; and their numbers, arms, and authority were so many unconscious tributes to his royal dignity and

might.

56. *But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.*

Our Lord's one great concern was that he might finish the work he had come to perform, and that so the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.

Jesus was not surprised that all the disciples forsook him, and fled; for he had foretold that they would do so. He knew them better than they knew themselves, so he prophesied that the flock would be scattered when the Shepherd should be smitten. So it was; for when the fierce wolves came and seized him, the sheep all fled.

It would have been to the eternal honor of any one of the disciples to have kept close to Christ right up to the last; but neither the loving John nor the boastful Peter stood the test of that solemn time. Human nature is such poor stuff, even at the best, that we cannot hope that any of us would have been braver or more faithful than the apostles were.

57. *And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.*

Some of the chief priests and elders were so enraged against Christ that they went to Gethsemane with the Roman cohort that was sent to arrest Jesus; the rest of them met at the house of Caiaphas the high priest, waiting for their victim to be brought to them. It was night, or early morning; but they were only too willing to sit up to judge the Lord of glory, and put the King of Israel to shame.

58. *But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.*

Peter was not to be blamed because he followed afar off, for at first he and John were the only two disciples who followed their captive Master. John went with Jesus into the high priest's palace, and by his influence Peter was also admitted. Attracted by the fire, Peter sat with the servants; a dangerous place for him, as it

soon proved. When a servant of Christ by his own choice sits with the servants of the wicked, sin and sorrow speedily follow.

59-61. *Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; but found none: yea, though many false witnesses, came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.*

The enemies of Jesus wanted to put him to death; they must therefore have at least two witnesses against him, for by the law of Moses the evidence of one witness was not sufficient to convict any person accused of a crime deserving the death penalty. The chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness, but found none; until at the last came two false witnesses, who wrested Christ's words, and misrepresented his meaning; but even they did not agree in their testimony (Mark 14:59), and therefore Jesus could not be condemned.

62. *And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?*

What was the use of answering? There really was nothing to answer except palpable and wilful misrepresentation. Our Lord also knew that the council had determined to put him to death; and beside that, there was another prophecy to be fulfilled: "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

63, 64. *But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, l adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

The time for Christ to speak had come. First he answered the high priest's solemn adjuration, and declared that he was "The Christ the Son of God." There

was no longer any reason for concealing that fact Then he uttered a prophecy that must have startled his accusers. He stood there bound, apparently alone and helpless before his powerful enemies, who expected soon to put him to death; yet the Prophet-King declared that they should be witnesses of his future glory, and see him “sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.” His hearers rightly understood him to claim to be divine, and gladly do we acknowledge the justice of his claim.

65, 66. *Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.*

If he had not been God Incarnate, he would have been guilty of blasphemy, and would have deserved to die. By the law of Moses, a blasphemer was to be stoned to death (Leviticus 24:16). Christ’s works had proved that he was God, so his words were not those of a blasphemer; but his confession gave his enemies the opening they were seeking, and they declared him to be unworthy to live: They answered and said, “He is guilty of death.” He had foretold that he would be crucified, wheras the punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning; so further forms of trial must be gone through before the end would come.

67, 68. *Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?*

Put together these two texts: Then did they spit in his face,—” And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.” In the day of his humiliation, they struck him, and mocked him, saying, “Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?” Unless they repented of their wickedness, the day will come when the Dinne Judge will point out each one of them who then abused him, and he will say, “Thou art the man!”

Oh, what shameful indignities and cruelties were heaped upon our precious Savior!

“See how the patient Jesus stands
Insulted in hid lowest case!
Sinners have bound the Almighty hands,
And spit in their Creator’s face.”

69, 70. *Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.*

While our Lord was in the high priest’s house, Peter sat without in the palace. In the courtyard overlooked by the rooms of the palace, the servants and officers had lighted a fire to warm themselves while they waited to see what would be done with Jesus.

Peter joined the company, and a damsel, who had let him in at John’s request, said to him, “Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee.” Now came the test of his confident boast to his Lord, “Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.” But he denied before them all saying, “I know not what thou sayest.” Whatever the consequences of confessing Christ might have been to Peter, they could not have been as bad as this base denial was.

71, 72. *And when he was gone out unto the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.*

There were so many who had seen Peter with Christ that he was easily recognized as one of the companions of the Nazarene. His second denial differed from the first, in that he added an oath to the lie, and declared concerning Christ, “I do not know the man.” Perhaps the oath was meant to prove that he was no follower of him who said, “Swear not at all;” or it may have been a return to Peter’s old habit before his conversion. When once a child of God gets on the downward road, no man can tell how fast and how far he will fall unless almighty grace be vouchsafed to him.

73. *And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to*

Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.

Even when Peter swore, there was something of the brogue of Galilee in his utterance, so that these people in Jerusalem detected his provincial dialect, and said to him, “Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee.” If a child of God begins to swear, he will not do it as the ungodly do, and he will be sure to be found out.

74, 75. *Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I now not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.*

Lying led to swearing, and swearing to cursing; no one but the Lord knows how much further Peter would have fallen if he had not been divinely arrested in his sinful career. Many men heard the cock crow that morning but to Peter it carried a solemn reminder of his Lord’s prophetic warning, “Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.” There was something else that affected Peter more than the crowing of the cock. Luke tells us that “The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.” Peter must have looked up at the Lord or he would not have seen that look of sorrow, pity, love, and forgiveness that the Lord gave him, ere he went out and wept bitterly.

If any one of us has denied the Lord that bought him, let him look up to him who now looks down from heaven, ready to pardon the backslider who cries with the returning prodigal, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no worthy to be called thy son.” more This same Peter, when reinstated in his Lord’s favor, preached on the day of Pentecost the sermon that led to the conviction and conversion of thousands of his hearers.

Matthew 27

1. *When the morning was come, all the chief the morning was come, all chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death:*

They were so full of enmity against Jesus that they were eager to seize the first opportunity to take counsel to put him to death. They had spent the latter part of the night, and the earliest moments of the morning, in examining, condemning, and abusing their illustrious prisoner. Jesus had foretold that he would be delivered to the Gentiles, so the next act in the terrible tragedy was his appearance before the Roman governor.

2. *And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.*

Those who had arrested Jesus had bound him before they took him to Annas (John 18:12, 13). Annas sent him bound, unto Caiaphas (John 18:24). Now the Sanhedrim officially bound him, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. As Isaac was bound before he was laid upon the altar, so was the great Anti-type bound before he was “brought as a lamb to the slaughter”, and delivered up to the Roman governor.

3, 4. *Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to use see thou to that.*

Perhaps Judas expected that Jesus would miraculously deliver himself from his captors; and when he saw that he was condemned, remorse seized him, and he carried back to his fellow criminals the reward of his infamy. There was one good result of his despairing confession: “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” Judas had been with our Lord in public and in private; and if he could have found a flaw in Christ’s character, this would have been the time to mention it; but even the traitor, in his dying speech, declared that Jesus was “innocent.” The chief priests and elders had no more pity for Judas than they had for Jesus; no remorse troubled them, they had secured the Savior, and they cared nothing for any of the consequences of their action. As for the traitor, he had made his bargain, and he must abide by it.

5. *And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

Those terrible words, and went and hanged himself, reveal the real character of the repentance of Judas. His was a repentance that needed to be repented of; not that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation. In the history of the Church of Christ, there have been a few instances of remorse like that of Judas, driving men to despair, if not to actual suicide. May God in mercy preserve us from any more repetitions of such an awful experience!

6-8. *And the chief priest took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.*

Whether Judas bought the field in which he committed suicide (Acts 1:18), or whether the chief priests, hearing how he meant to spend the pieces of silver, carried out his intention, makes no real difference in the result. The field of blood became the perpetual memorial of the infamy of Judas. When he sold his Lord, he little thought what would be done with the money received as the price of the betrayal. In the fullest sense possible, he was guilty of the blood of the Lord; that blood was upon him, not to seal his pardon, but to confirm his condemnation.

9, 10. *Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potters field, as the lord appointed me.*

Even the disposal of the thirty pieces of silver fulfilled an ancient prophecy. The dark sayings of the prophets as well as their brighter utterances shall all be proved to be true as, one by one, they come to maturity.

The fate of Judas should be a solemn warning to all professing Christians, and especially to all ministers. He was one of the twelve apostles, yet he was a son of perdition, and in the end he went to his own place. Each of us has his own place, heaven or hell; which is it?

11. *And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.*

Jesus did not look much like a king as he stood before Pilate; there was little enough of the robes of royalty about his simple apparel. Yet even in his humiliation there must have been so much of majesty that even the governor was prompted to ask, “art thou the King of the Jews?” There was no longer any reason why the King should conceal his true position, so he answered, “Thou sayest.” “It is even as thou sayest, I am the King of the Jews.” The Jews rejected their King: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” Yet was he their King although they refused to bow before his sceptre of grace and mercy.

12-14. *And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.*

This was the time for Jesus to be dumb, “like a sheep before her shearers.” His silence astonished Pilate, as his speech had before overawed the officers sent to arrest him (John 7:45, 46). Jesus answered nothing, for he was there as his

people's representative; and though he had not sinned, they were guilty of all that was falsely laid to his charge. He might have cleared himself of every accusation that was brought against him, but that would have left the load of guilt upon those whose place he came to take; so he answered never a word. Such silence was sublime.

15-18. *Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.*

Pilate was really anxious to deliver Christ from his cruel enemies; but; like most wicked men, he was a great coward, so he attempted to gain his end by a crafty artifice. He knew that for envy they had delivered him; and he may have hoped that Jesus was so popular among the people that an appeal to the masses would result in a verdict in Christ's favor, especially as the choice of one to be released lay between "the King of the Jews "and a notoriously wicked man, Barabbas. Surely they would ask for their King to be set at liberty! Pilate little knew the sway the chief priests had over the populace, nor the fickleness of the crowds, whose jubilant cry of "Hosanna! "would so soon be changed to hoarse shouts of "Away with him! Crucify him!"

19. *When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.*

Here was an unlooked-for witness to the innocence of Christ. Whether the dream of Pilate's wife was a divine revelation of Christ's glory or not, we cannot tell; but the message sent by her to the governor must have made him even more anxious than before to release Jesus.

20-22. *But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered*

and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbras. Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called. Christ? They all say unto him, let him be crucified.

Now the die is cast, the choice of the multitude is made; Barabbas is preferred before Jesus. The Lord of glory had been sold by Judas for the price of a slave; and now a robber, a murderer, and a leader in sedition, is a greater favorite with the people than the Prince of life. Were there no voices raised in Christ's favor? Were there none out of all that multitude whose sick he had healed, whoso hunger he had satisfied, who would remember him in that day, and ask that he might be spared? No, not one; there were none in the crowd silently sympathising with the Savior; they all said, "Let him be crucified."

23. *And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.*

A blind, unreasoning hate had taken possession of the people. They gave no answer to Pilate's wondering enquiry, "Why, what evil hath he done?" for he had done nothing amiss; they only repeated the brutal demand, "Let him be crucified."

The world's hatred of Christ is shown in similar fashion today. He has done no evil, no one has suffered harm at his hands, all unite to pronounce him innocent; and yet they practically cry, "Away with him! Crucify him!"

24. *When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.*

Ah! Pilate, you need something stronger than water to wash the blood of that just person off your hands. You cannot rid yourself of responsibility by that farce. He who has power to prevent a wrong is guilty of the act if he permits others to do it, even though he does not actually commit it himself.

Pilate joined with all the other witnesses in declaring that Jesus was “just “or “righteous.” He even went so far as to declare, “I find in him no fault at all” (John 8:38).

25. *Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.*

All the people willingly took upon themselves the guilt of the murder of our dear Lord: “His blood be on us, and on our children.” This fearful imprecation must have been remembered by many when the soldiers of Titus spared neither age nor sex, and the Jewish capital became the veritable Aceldama, the field of blood. That self-imposed curse still rests upon unbelieving Israel; and till she accepts the Messiah whom she then rejected, the brand will remain upon the besotted nation’s brow.

26. *Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus he delivered him to be crucified.*

The Roman scourging was one of the most terrible punishments to which anyone could be subjected. The Jewish beating with rods was a mild chastisement compared with the brutal flagellation by the imperial lictors; yet even this our Lord endured for our sakes. These were the stripes by which we were healed (1 Peter 2:24). Yet the scourging was but the beginning of the awful end: When he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Knowing him to be innocent, Pilate first scourged him, and then gave him up to the fury of his fanatical foes.

27-30. *Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.*

Ridicule is very painful to bear. In our Savior's case, there was great cruelty mixed with mockery. These Roman soldiers were men to whom bloodshed was amusement; and now that there was given up into their hands one who was charged with making himself a king, we can conceive what a subject for jest the gentle Jesus was in their esteem. They were not touched by the gentleness of his manner, nor by his sorrowful countenance; but they sought to invent all manner of scorn, to pour on his devoted head. Surely the world never saw a more marvellous scene than the King of kings thus derided as a mimic monarch by the meanest of men. The whole band of soldiers was gathered unto him, for seldom was such sport provided in the common hall. Jesus is a king, so he must wear the garb of royalty: they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe, some old soldier's scarlet or purple coat. The king must be crowned: when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head. He must sway a sceptre: a reed in his right hand. Homage must be paid to him: and they bowed the knee before him. Cruel men! Yet probably they knew no better.

Oh, that we were half as inventive in devising honor for our King as these soldiers were in planning his dishonor! Let us render to Christ the real homage that these men pretended to offer him. Let us crown him Lord of all, and in truest loyalty bow the knee, and hail him, "King."

31. *And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.*

It was divinely overruled that Jesus should go forth with his own raiment on him, that nobody might say that another person had been substituted for the Savior. As they led him away, robed in that well-known seamless garment, woven from the top throughout, all who looked upon him would say, "It is the Nazarene going forth to execution; we recognize his dress as well as his person."

32. *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; him they compelled to bear his cross.*

Perhaps they were afraid that Christ would die from exhaustion; so they compelled Simon to bear his cross, Any one of Christ's followers might have wished to have been this man of Cyrene; but we need not envy him, for there is a

cross for each of us to carry. Oh, that we were as willing to bear Christ's cross as Christ was to bear our sins on his cross! If anything happens to us by way of persecution or ridicule for our Lord's sake, and the gospel's, let us cheerfully endure it. As knights are made by a stroke from the sovereign's sword, so shall we become princes in Christ's realm as he lays his cross on our shoulders.

33, 34. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

Golgotha was the common place of execution for malefactors, the Tyburn or Old Bailey of Jerusalem, outside the gate of the city. There was a special symbolical reason for Christ's suffering without the gate, and his followers are bidden to "go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach "(Hebrews 13:11-13).

A stupefying draught was given to the condemned, to take away something of the agony of crucifixion; but our Lord came to suffer, and he would not take anything that would at all impair his faculties. He did not forbid his fellow-sufferers drinking the vinegar mingled with gall ("wine mingled with myrrh," Mark 15:23), but he would not drink thereof. Jesus did not refuse this draught because of its bitterness, for he was prepared to drink even to the last dreadful dregs the bitter cup of wrath which was his people's due.

35. *And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.*

There is a world of meaning in that short sentence, and they crucified him, driving their bolts of iron through his blessed hands and feet, fastening him to the cross, and lifting him up to hang there upon a gibbet reserved for felons. We can scarcely realize all that the crucifixion meant to our dear Lord; but we can join in Father's prayer,—

"Lord Jesus! may we love and weep, Since thou for us art crucified."

Then was fulfilled all that our Lord had foretold in Chapter 20:17-19, except his resurrection, the time for which had not arrived.

The criminals' clothes were the executioners' perquisite. The Roman soldiers who crucified Christ had no thought of fulfilling the Scriptures when they parted his garments, casting lots; yet their action was exactly that which had been foretold in Psalm 22:18. The seamless robe would have been spoiled if it had been rent, so the soldiers raffled for the vesture while they shared the other garments of our Lord. The dice would be almost stained with the blood of Christ, yet the gamblers played on beneath the shadow of his cross. Gambling is the most hardening of all vices. Beware of it in any form! No games of chance should be played by Christians, for the blood of Christ seems to have bespattered them all.

36. *And sitting down they watched him there;*

Some watched him from curiosity, some to make sure that he really did die, some even delighted their cruel eyes with his sufferings; and there were some, hard by the cross, who wept and bewailed, a sword passing through their own hearts while the Son of man was agonizing even unto death.

37. *And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

What a marvellous providence it was that moved Pilate's pen! The representative of the Roman emperor was little likely to concede kingship to any man; yet he deliberately wrote, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS, and nothing would induce him to alter what he had written. Even on his cross, Christ was proclaimed King, in the sacerdotal Hebrew, the classical Greek, and the common Latin, so that everybody in the crowd could read the inscription.

When will the Jews own Jesus as their King? They will do so one day, looking on him whom they pierced. Perhaps they will think more of Christ when Christians think more of them; when our hardness of heart towards them has gone, possibly their hardness of heart towards Christ may also disappear.

38. *Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.*

As if to show that they regarded Christ as the worst of the three criminals, they put him between the two thieves, giving him the place of dishonor. Thus was the prophecy fulfilled, “He was numbered with the transgressors.” The two malefactors deserved to die, as one of them admitted (Luke 23:40, 41); but a greater load of guilt rested upon Christ, for “He bare the sin of many,” and therefore he was rightly distinguished as the King of sufferers, who could truly ask,—

“Was ever grief like mine?”

Nothing torments a man when in pain more than mockery. When Jesus Christ most wanted words of pity and looks of kindness, they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads. Perhaps the most painful part of ridicule is to have one’s most solemn sayings turned to scorn, as were our Lord’s words about the temple of his body: “Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself.” He might have saved himself, he might have “come down from the cross; “but if he had done so, we could never have become the sons of God. It was because he was the Son of God that he did not come down from the cross, but hung there until he had completed the sacrifice for his people’s sin. Christ’s cross is the Jacob’s ladder by which we mount up to heaven.

This is the cry of the Socinians today, “Come down from the cross. Give up the atoning sacrifice, and we will be Christians.” Many are willing to believe in Christ, but not in Christ crucified. They admit that he was a good man and a great teacher; but by rejecting his vicarious atonement, they practically un-Christ the Christ, as these mockers at Golgotha did.

41-43. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.*

The chief priests, with the scribes and elders, forgetting their high station and rank, joined the ribald crew in mocking Jesus in his death pangs. Every word was emphatic; every syllable cut and pierced our Lord to the heart. They mocked him as a Savior: “He saved others; himself he cannot save.” They mocked him as a King: “If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross,

and, we will believe him." They mocked him as a believer: "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him." They mocked him as the Son of God: "For he said, I am the Son of God." Those who say that Christ was a good man virtually admit his deity, for he claimed to be the Son of God. If he was not what he professed to be, he was an impostor. Notice the testimony that Christ's bitterest enemies bore even as they reviled him: "He saved others;" "He is the King of Israel" (R.V.); "He trusted in God."

44. *The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

The sharers of his misery, the abjects who were crucified with him, joined in reviling Jesus. Nothing was wanting to fill up his cup of suffering and shame. The conversion of the penitent thief was all the more remarkable because he had but a little while before been amongst the mockers of his Savior. What a trophy of divine grace he became!

45. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

Some have thought that this darkness covered the whole world, and so caused even a heathen to exclaim, "Either the world is about to expire, or the God who made the world is in anguish." This darkness was supernatural; it was not an eclipse. The sun could no longer look upon his Maker surrounded by those who mocked him. He covered his face, and travelled on in tenfold night, in very shame that the great Sun of righteousness should himself be in such terrible darkness.

46. *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

In order that the sacrifice of Christ might be complete, it pleased the Father to forsake his well-beloved Son. Sin was laid on Christ, so God must turn away his face from the Sin-Bearer. To be deserted of his God, was the climax of Christ's grief, the quintessence of his sorrow. See here the distinction between the

martyrs and their Lord; in their dying agonies they have been divinely sustained; but Jesus, suffering as the Substitute for sinners, was forsaken of God. Those saints who have known what it is to have their Father's face hidden from them even for a brief space, can scarcely imagine the suffering that wrung from our Savior the agonizing cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

47. *Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, his man calleth for Elias.*

They knew better, yet they jested at the Savior's prayer. Wicked, wilfully, and scornfully, they turned his death-shriek into ridicule.

48, 49. *And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.*

A person in such agony as Jesus was suffering might have mentioned many pangs that he was enduring; but it was necessary for him to say, "I thirst," in order that another Scripture might be fulfilled. One of them, more compassionate than his companions, ran, and took a spurge, and filled it with vinegar, from the vessel probably brought by the soldiers for their own use, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. It always seems to me very remarkable that the sponge, which is the very lowest form of animal life, should have been brought into contact with Christ, who is at the top of all life. In his death the whole circle of creation was completed. As the sponge brought refreshment to the lips of our dying Lord, so may the least of God's living ones help to refresh him now that he has ascended from the cross to the throne.

50. *Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.*

Christ's strength was not exhausted; his last word was uttered with a loud voice, like the shout of a conquering warrior. And what a word it was, "It is finished"! Thousands of sermons have been preached upon that little sentence; but who can tell all the meaning that lies compacted within it? It is a kind of infinite expression for breadth, and depth, and length, and height altogether

immeasurable. Christ's life being finished, perfected, completed; he yielded up the ghost, willingly dying, laying down his life as he said he would: "I lay down my life for the sheep. I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

51-53. *And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*

Christ's death was the end of Judaism: The veil of the temple rent in twain from the top to the bottom As if shocked at the sacrilegious murder of her Lord, the temple rent her garments, like one stricken with horror at some stupendous crime. The body of Christ being rent, the veil of the temple was torn in twain from the top to the bottom. Now was there an entrance made into the holiest of all, by the blood of Jesus; and a way of access to God was opened for every sinner who trusted in Christ's atoning sacrifice.

See what marvels accompanied and followed the death of Christ: The earth did quake, and, the rocks rent; and the graves were opened.

Thus did the material world pay homage to him whom man had rejected; while nature's convulsions foretold what will happen when Christ's voice once more shakes not the earth only, but also heaven.

These first miracles wrought in connection with the death of Christ were typical of spiritual wonders that will be continued till he comes again,— rocky hearts are rent, graves of sin are opened, those who have been dead in trespasses and sins, and buried in sepulchres of lust and evil, are quickened, and come out from among the dead, and go unto the holy city, the New Jerusalem.

54. *Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

These Roman soldiers had never witnessed such scenes in connection with an execution before, and they could only come to one conclusion about the illustrious prisoner whom they had put to death: “Truly this was the Son of God.” It was strange that those men should confess what the chief priests and scribes and elders denied; yet since their day it has often happened that the most abandoned and profane have acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God while their religious rulers have denied his divinity.

55, 56. *And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s children.*

We have no record of any unkindness to our Lord from any woman, though we have many narratives of the loving ministry of women at various periods in his life. It was meet, therefore, that even at Calvary many women were there beholding afar off. The ribald crowd and the rough soldiers would not permit these timid yet brave souls to come near; but we learn from John 9:25 that some of them edged their way through the throng till they “stood by the cross of Jesus.” Love will dare anything.

57, 58. *When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus’ disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.*

This rich man of Arimathaea, named, Joseph,- a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, was Jesus’s disciple, “but secretly for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38); yet when his Lord was actually dead, extraordinary courage nerved his spirit, and boldly he went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Joseph and Nicodemus are types of many more who have been emboldened by the cross of Christ to do what, without that mighty magnet, they would never have attempted. When night comes, the stars appear; so in the night of Christ’s death these two bright stars shone forth with blessed radiance. Some flowers bloom only at night: such a blossom was the courage of Joseph and Nicodemus.

59, 60. *And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.*

Our King, even in the grave, must have the best of the best: his body was wrapped in a clean linen cloth, and, laid in Joseph's own new tomb, thus completing the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9. Some see in this linen shroud an allusion to the garments in which priests were to be clothed.

Joseph's was a virgin sepulchre, wherein up to that time no one had been buried, so that, when Jesus rose, none could see, that another came forth from the tomb instead of him.

That rock-hewn cell in the garden sanctified every part of God's acre where saints lie buried. Instead of longing to live till Christ comes, as some do, we might rather pray to have fellowship with Jesus in his death and burial.

61. *And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.*

Love and faith were both typified by these two Marys sitting over against the sepulchre. They will be the last to leave their Lord's resting-place, and the first to return to it when the Sabbath is past.

Can we cling to Christ when his cause seems to be dead and buried When truth is fallen in the streets, or is even buried in the sepulchre of scepticism or superstition, can we still believe in it, and look forward to its resurrection? That is what some of us are doing at the present time. O Lord, keep us faithful!

62-64. *Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priest and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last*

error shall be worse than the first.

These punctilious priests and Pharisees, who were so scrupulous about keeping the Sabbath, did not mind profaning the day of rest by holding a consultation with the Roman governor. They knew that Christ was dead and buried, but they still stood in dread of his power. They called him a “deceiver”; and they even pretended to “remember” what “he said, while he was yet alive.” At his trial, their false witnesses gave another meaning to his words; but they knew all the while that he was speaking of his resurrection, not of the Temple on Mount Zion. Now they are afraid that, even in the sepulchre, he will bring to nought all their plans for his destruction. They must have known that the disciples of Jesus would not steal him away, and say unto the people, “He is risen from the dead;” so they probably feared that he really would come forth from the tomb. Whatever conscience they had, made great cowards of them; so they begged Pilate to do what he could to prevent the rising of their victim.

65, 66. *Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

The chief priests and Pharisees wanted Pilate to make the sepulchre sure, but he left them to secure it. There seems to have been a grim sort of irony about the governor’s reply: “Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.” Whether he meant it as a taunt, or as a command to secure the sepulcher, they became unconsciously witnesses that Christ’s resurrection was a supernatural act. The tomb in the rock could not be entered except by rolling away the stone, and they guarded that by sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

According to the absurd teaching of the Rabbis, rubbing ears of corn was a kind of threshing, and therefore was unlawful on the Sabbath; yet here were these men doing what, by similar reasoning, might be called furnace and foundry work, and calling out a guard of Roman legionaries to assist them in breaking the Sabbath. Unintentionally, they did honor to the sleeping King when they obtained the representatives of the Roman emperor to watch his resting-place till the third morning, when he came forth Victor over sin and death and the grave. Thus once more was the wrath of man made to praise the King of glory, and the remainder of that wrath was restrained.

Matthew 28

1. *In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.*

While the Jewish Sabbath lasted, they paid to it due respect. They did not even go to the sepulchre to perform the kindly offices of embalmment; but when the old Sabbath was dying away, and the new and better Sabbath began to dawn, these holy women found their way back to their Lord's tomb. Woman must be first at the sepulchre as she was last at the cross. We may well forget that she was first in the transgression; the honor which Christ put upon her took away that shame. Who but Mary Magdalene should be the first at the tomb? Out of her Christ had cast seven devils, and now she acts as if into her he had sent seven angels. She had received so much grace that she was full of love to her Lord.

2. *And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and eat upon it.*

Death was being upheaved, and all the bars of the sepulchre were beginning to burst. When the King awoke from the sleep of death, he shook the world; the bed-chamber in which he rested for a little while trembled as the heavenly Hero arose from his couch: Behold, there was a great earth quake. Nor was the King unattended in his rising: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven. It was not merely one of the angelic host, but some mighty presence-angel, "the angel of the Lord", who came to minister to him on that resurrection morn. Jesus was put in the prison of the tomb as a hostage for his people; therefore he must not break out by himself, but the angelic sheriff's officer must bring the warrant for his deliverance, and set the captive at liberty. When the angel had rolled back the

stone from the door, he sat upon it, as if to defy earth and hell ever to roll it back again. That great stone seems to represent the sin of all Christ's people, which shut them up in prison; it can never be laid again over the mouth of the sepulchre of any child of God. Christ has risen, and all his saints must rise, too.

3, 4. *His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.*

It took a great deal to alarm Roman soldiers; they were inured to all manner of terrors, but this angel's dashing countenance and snow-white raiment paralyzed them with fright, until they swooned away, and became as dead men. He does not appear to have drawn a flaming sword, nor even to have spoken to the keepers; but the presence of perfect purity overawed these rough legionaries. What terror will strike through the ungodly when all the hosts of angels shall descend, and surround the throne of the reigning Christ on the last great day!

5. *And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.*

Let the soldiers tremble, let them lie as if dead through fright, but, "Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. "Those who seek Jesus need not fear. These women were mistaken in seeking the living among the dead, yet their seeking ended in finding. They did fear, although the angel said, "Fear not." Only Jesus can silence the fears of trembling hearts.

6, 7. *He is not here: for he is risen as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you.*

Jesus always keeps his word: "He is risen, as he said." He said he would rise from the dead, and he did; he says that his people also shall rise, and they shall. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly," the angel would not let the women stay long looking into the sepulchre, for there was work for them

to do. In this world, we cannot afford to spend all our time in contemplation, however heavenly it may be. Notice the angel's words: first "See," and then "Go." Make sure about the fact for yourselves, and then let others know of it. What you know, tell; and do it "quickly." Swift be your feet; such good news as you have to carry should not be long on the road. "The King's business required haste."

"Tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him." Matthew wrote THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM, yet in his writings there is much about that despised region called "Galilee of the Gentiles", that border-land which touches us as well as the chosen seed of Abraham. There, in Galilee, is the place where Jesus will hold the first general assembly of his church after his resurrection.

8. *And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.*

That seems a strange mixture, fear and great joy, awe and delight, doubt and faith; yet the joy was greater than the fear. It was not joy and great fear, but "fear and great joy." Have we never had that mixture — drops of grief, like April showers, and peace and joy, like sunlight from heaven, making a glorious rainbow reminding us of God's covenant of peace? A holy fear, mingled with great joy, is one of the sweetest compounds we can bring to God's altar; such were the spices these holy women took away from Christ's sepulchre. Fear and joy would both make them run to bring his disciples word. Either of these emotions gives speed to the feet; but when "fear and great joy" are combined, running is the only pace that records with the messengers' feelings.

9, 10. *And as they went to fell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.*

Saints running in the way of obedience are likely to be met by Jesus. Some Christians travel to heaven so slowly that they are overtaken by follies or by faults, by slumber or by Satan; but he who is Christ's running footman shall meet his Master while he is speeding on his way.

And they came and held, him by the foot, and worshipped him. These holy women were not Unitarians; knowing that Jesus was the Son of God, they had no hesitation in worshipping him. There must have been a new attraction about Christ after he had risen from the dead, something more sweet about the tones of his voice, something more charming about the countenance that had been so marred at Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Golgotha. Perhaps these timid souls clung to their Lord through fear that he might be again taken for them, so "they held him by the feet, and worshipped him," fear and faith striving within them for the mastery.

Jesus perceived the palpitation of these poor women's hearts, so he repeated the angel's message, "Be not afraid." He also confirmed the angel's information about "Galilee", only he spoke of his disciples as "My brethren." When Christ's servants, angelic or human, speak what he has bidder them, he will endorse what they say.

11. *Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.*

While good people were active, bad people were active, too. Some of the watch, having recovered from their fright, came into the city to report the startling scenes they had witnessed. It is noteworthy that they did not go to Pilate; they had been placed at the disposal of the chief priests, and therefore, while some of them remained on guard at the sepulchre, others of the soldiers went to their ecclesiastical employers, and showed unto them all the things that were done, so far as they knew the particulars. A startling story they had to tell; and one that brought fresh terror to the priests, and led to further sin on their part.

12-15. *And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among. the Jews until this day.*

For money Christ was betrayed, and for money the truth about his resurrection was kept back as far as it could be: They gave large money unto the soldiers. Money has had a hardening effect on some of the highest servants of God, and all who have to touch the filthy lucre have need to pray for grace to keep them from being harmed by being brought into contact with it.

The lie put into the soldiers' mouths was so palpable that no one ought to have been deceived by it: "Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept." A Roman soldier would have committed suicide sooner than confess that he had slept at his post of duty. If they were asleep, how did they know what happened? The chief priests and elders were not afraid of Pilate hearing of their lie; or if he did, they knew that golden arguments would be as convincing with him as with the common soldiers: "If this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you."

The soldiers acted just as many men have continued to do from their day to ours: They took the money, and did as they were taught.

"What makes a doctrine straight and clear? About five hundred pounds a year," is an "old saw "that can be "reset "today. How much even of religious teaching can be accounted for by the fact that "they took the money"! There are many who make high professions of godliness, who would soon give them up if they did not pay. May none of us ever be affected by considerations of profit and loss in matters of doctrine, matters of duty, and matters of right and wrong!

And this saying is commonly reported among the Jesus unto this day. This lie, which had not a leg to stand upon, lived on till Matthew wrote his Gospel, and long afterwards. Nothing lives so long as a lie, except the truth; we cannot kill either the truth or a lie, therefore let us beware of ever starting a falsehood on its terrible career. Let us never teach even the least error to a little child, for it may live on and become a great heresy long after we are dead.

The modern philosophy, which is thrust forward to cast a slur upon the great truths of revelation, is no more worthy of credence than this lie put into the mouths of the soldiers; yet common report gives it currency, and amongst a certain clique it pays.

16, 17. *Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him,*

they worshipped him: but some doubted.

Notice those words, the eleven disciples. There were twelve; but Judas, one of the twelve, had gone to his own place; and Peter, who had denied his Lord, had been restored to his place among the apostles. The eleven went away into Galilee, to the trysting-place their Lord had fixed: into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. Jesus always keeps his appointments, so he met the company that assembled at the selected spot: and when they saw him, they worshipped him. Seeing their Lord, they began to adore him, end to render divine honors to him, for to them he was God: but some doubted. Where will not Mr. Doubting and other members of his troublesome family be found? We can never expect to be quite free from doubters in the Church, since even in the presence of the newly risen Christ "some doubted." Yet the Lord revealed himself to the assembled company, although he knew that some among them would doubt that it was really their Lord who was risen from the dead.

Probably this was the occasion referred to by Paul, when the risen Savior "was seen of above five hundred brethren at once." It was evidently a meeting for which he had made a special appointment, and his own words to the women, following those of the angel, seem to point this out as the one general assembly of his Church on earth before he ascended to his Father. Those who gathered were, therefore, a representative company; and the words addressed to them were spoken to the one Church of Jesus Christ throughout all time.

18-20. *And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

What a truly royal speech our King made to his loyal subjects! What a contrast was this scene in Galilee to the groans in Gethsemane and the gloom of Golgotha! Jesus claimed omnipotence and universal sovereignty: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." This is part of the reward of his humiliation (Philippians 2:6-10). On the cross he was proclaimed King of the Jews; but when John saw him, in his apocalyptic vision, "on his head were many

crowns," and on his vesture and on his thigh he had a name written, KING OF KINGS , AND LORD OF LORDS .

By virtue of his kingly authority, he issued this last great command to His disciples: "Go ye therefore, and teach" or, "make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." This is our commission as well as theirs. From it we learn that our first business is to make disciples of all nations, and we can only do that by teaching them the truth as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and seeking the power of the Holy Spirit to make our teaching effective in those we try to instruct in divine things. Next, those who by faith in Christ become his disciples are to be baptized into the name of the Triune Jehovah; and after baptism they are still to be taught all that Christ commanded. We are not to invent anything new; nor to change anything to suit the current of the age; but to teach the baptized believers to observe "all things whatsoever" our Divine Thing has commanded.

This is the perpetual commission of the Church of Christ; and the great seal of the Kingdom attached to it, giving the power to execute it, and guaranteeing its success, is the King's assurance of his continual presence with his faithful followers: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." May all of us realize his presence with us until he Call us to be with him, "for ever with the Lord"! Amen.

MARK

Mark 1

1, 2. *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*

In the book of Malachi, the Lord God had promised to send a messenger before Messiah. John was all that the very greatest of the prophets had been; and he came nearer to Jesus than all the rest; his Master's steps were close upon his heel. He shone like Milton's star —

"Fairest of stars, last in the train of night,
If better thou belong'st not to the dawn."

He was almost a gospel-preacher, and failing to reach that point, he was chief among the prophets, yea, and more than a prophet.

3. *The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.*

The prophets not only described the King, but his forerunner also. They mention the character of this harbinger: he was a "voice"; (Jesus is "the Word"); his tone, "crying"; his place, "in the wilderness"; and his message, which was one of announcement, in which he required preparation for the coming king: "Prepare

ye the way of the Lord." Men's hearts were like a wilderness, wherein there is no way; but as loyal subjects throw up roads for the approach of beloved princes, so were men to welcome the Lord, with their hearts made right and ready to receive him.

4. *John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.*

John came not to the court, but to lone wildernesses: places left to sheep and a handful of rural folk. The mission of Christ Jesus is to the moral wastes and to the desolate places of the earth. To them the Lord's harbinger makes his way, and there he fitly preaches the command, "Repent ye." Give up your thorns and briars, O ye wildernesses; for your Lord is coming to you!

5. *And there went out unto him all the land of Judaea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.*

The people were expecting a Messiah, and so they went en masse to John as soon as his shrill voice had startled the solitudes. Baptism, or the washing of the body in water, most fitly accompanied the cry, "Repent ye." The "Confessing their sins" which went with baptism in Jordan gave it its meaning. Apart from the acknowledgment of guilt, it would have been a mere bathing of the person without spiritual significance; but the confession which went with it made it an instructive sign. John must have inwardly wondered to see the multitudes come; but his chief thought ran forward to his coming Lord. He thought more of him than of all Judea.

6. *And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey;*

He was rough and stern, like Elijah. His garments betokened his simplicity, his sternness, his self-denial. His food, the product of the desert where he dwelt, showed that he cared nothing for luxuries. His whole bearing was symbolical; but it was also fit, and suitable for his office. The plainest of food is best for body and mind and spirit, and, moreover, it fosters manliness. Lord, let not my

meat, or drink, or garments, hinder me in thy work!

7. *And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.*

John considered himself to be nothing more than a household slave, unworthy of the office of removing his Master's sandals. It was not John's business to attract followers to himself, but to point them to Jesus, and he very faithfully discharged his commission. His opinion of his Master, of whom he was the herald, was a very high one; he reverenced him as the anointed of the Lord, the King of Israel, and, consequently, he was not tempted into elevating himself into a rival.

8. *I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.*

John could plunge the penitent into water; but a greater than he must baptize men into the Holy Ghost and into fire. Repentance is well attended by washing in water; but the true baptism of the believer by the Lord Jesus himself brings us into spiritual floods of holy fire.

9. *And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.*

In due time, when all was prepared, the Prince quitted his obscurity. Putting himself in a lowly place, he did not summon the Baptizer to come to the Lake of Galilee, but went down the country along the banks of the Jordan to him, seeking baptism.

Should any of the servants neglect what their Lord so heartily attended to? Do any say, "It is not essential"? Was it essential to our Lord Jesus? What was becoming in him is not unbecoming in his followers. If it should cost us a journey, let us attend to the command which is binding on all believers.

10. *And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens*

opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

In Baptism, our Lord was openly attested and sealed as the "beloved Son", both by the Word of God, and the Spirit of God. What more witness is needed? It is often so with his people: their sonship is made clear during an act of obedience, and the Word and the Spirit bear witness with their consciences.

Our Lord Jesus had now to enter on his public life-work, and he did so in the best manner. As his need appeared, his source of supply was set open before him. On him also the divine anointing descended. Like a swift-winged, pure, and quiet dove, the Spirit came, and found a resting-place in him. When he had been immersed into the element of water, he was immediately surrounded by the divine element of the Spirit. Then, also, was his ear charmed with the Father's audible acknowledgment of him, and with the expression of that good pleasure which the Lord God had always felt in him. It was a glorious moment. Our King was now proclaimed and anointed. Would not his next step be to take the Kingdom? We shall see.

Our Lord and King is now fully before us. He has been preceded, predicted, and pointed out by John the Baptist; he has been dedicated to his work in baptism; he has been anointed by the Spirit, and confessed by the Father; and therefore he has fairly entered upon his royal work. May none of us in the service of the Lord run before our time, or go forward without a sense of the Father's approval, and without that spiritual unction which is from above!

12, 13. *And immediately the Spirit driveth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.*

No sooner anointed than assailed. The time selected was immediately after his Sonship had been attested, when we might have thought that he was least likely to be attacked upon that point. Times of hallowed enjoyment verge on periods of temptation. Our Lord was driven "into the wilderness": the place was one of great solitude, where he would be alone in the conflict. The devil himself came to the spot and plied his diabolical arts upon the man ordained to be his

Destroyer.

Let me be ever on my watch-tower, and particularly during seasons of great enjoyment; for then is Satan most likely to assail me. Lord Jesus, be thou with me in the hour of my testing; for thou knowest how to succor the tempted.

14. *Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God*

When one servant of God is laid aside, it is a call to the rest to be the more earnest. So after John the Baptist was put into prison, "Jesus came into Galilee." Sometimes a loss may be a gain, and if the loss of John was the means of bringing out Jesus, certainly both the Church and the world were the gainers.

15. *And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

It is clear, from this passage, that our Lord exhorted men to repent, and to believe the gospel. There are some, who profess to be his followers, who will not suffer us to do this. We may teach men, and warn them, they say, but we must not exhort them to repent and believe. Well, as the contention of these people is not in accordance with the Scriptures, we are content to follow the Scriptures, and to do as Jesus did, so we shall say to sinners, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel."

16–18. *Now as he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them; Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. And straightway they forsook their nets and followed him.*

The gospel minister is like the fisherman with a net. I have sometimes heard the comparison drawn as though the gospel fisherman had a hook and a line, which he has not. His business is not to entice a fish to swallow his bait but to cast the net all round him, and lift him, by his grace, out of the element in which he lies

in sin, into the boat where Christ still sit, as he sat, in the olden days, in the boat on the sea of Galilee. To shut the sinner up to faith in Jesus Christ—that is the main work of the true gospel fisherman.

19, 20. *And when he had gone a little farther thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him.*

They never had cause to regret that they did so. Whatever they left, they were abundantly rewarded. They had a rich reward here on earth; and they have a far richer reward in heaven. Whatever a man gives up for Christ is a blessed investment, which will, sooner or later, bring him good interest.

21, 22. *And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.*

He did not do as the scribes did, who made a great parade of learning by quoting this Rabbi and the other, but Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” He spoke as one who felt that he had authority to speak in his own name, and in the name of God his Father. This method of teaching quite astonished the Jews. I wish that those who now hear the gospel, might be astonished at it, and be astonished into the belief of it by the power with which it comes home to their consciences and hearts.

23-26. *And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, Let us alone;*

How often that is still the cry of sinners, “Let us alone. Why do not you hold your own views, and let us alone?” Yes the devils, and those whom they control, still say, “Let us alone.” But it is a part of the gospel to attack that which is not the gospel, and it is as much the duty of the minister of the gospel to denounce error as to proclaim truth. If we do so, the old cry will still be heard, “Let us

alone. Let us alone."

What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him

He did not want any testimony from the devil. When a man of ill character once praised Plato, the philosopher said, "What can I have done wrong that such a fellow as that speaks well of me?" So when the devil bore testimony to the divinity of Christ, "Jesus rebuked him,"—

saying, hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him.

For, if Satan must come out of a man, he will do him as much mischief as ever he can before he departs. His wrath is all the greater because his time is so short.

"He worries whom he can't devour,
With a malicious joy."

27. *And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.*

It was the authority of his preaching which first astonished them; and then the authority with which he wrought his miracle, and subdued the world of demons. Blessed be God. Christ has not abdicated his authority. He is still the great Messenger of God, full of divine authority to save men, and to deliver them from the power of Satan.

28. *And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee*

“Immediately.” That is, as soon as Jesus had healed the man with an unclean spirit, his fame spread like wildfire. The miracle was reported from mouth to mouth till everybody in that region knew of it. It was said that the words and writings of Martin Luther were carried as by the wings of angels, so speedily was everything that he said and wrote made known far and wide. On this occasion, it was so with our Lord’s wondrous deed of mercy and power: “Immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.”

29. *And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.*

“Forthwith,” or, again, “immediately.” Simon and Andrew and James and John were intimately connected; we are told that they were “partners” in their fishing business. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, seem to have been in a good position in life; we read that their father had “hired servants” employed in the boats. So James and John went with Simon and Andrew into their partners’ house when Christ went there after performing that notable miracle in the synagogue.

30. *But Simon’s wife’s mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her.*

There were at least four of Christ’s followers in the house, yet the mother of the wife of one of them lay sick of a fever. Grace does not prevent suffering in the body; there will still be physical diseases even though in the soul there is spiritual health.

31. *And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.*

Jesus was very calm; he was not afraid of catching the fever. See how deliberately, and with what solemn, kindly dignity he deals with this sick woman: “He came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up.” He gently raises her, and she yields to his tender uplifting hand, and suddenly finds herself cooled of the burning fever, and perfectly restored to health and strength; so she rises

from her bed, and the first thing she does is to minister unto them. I am sure that, whenever the Lord helps any of his people out of their temporal or spiritual distresses, they feel at once that they must say, “What shall we render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward us?”

Her ministering unto them proved that the fever was quite gone, and gone in a way in which it does not ordinarily go; for, as you all know, fever usually leaves behind it extreme weakness. It seems to burn up the strength that is in one; and after it is gone, on is not fit even to wait at table for a long while. But Peter’s wife’s mother immediately the fever was gone, rose and “ministered unto them.” Christ’s cures are always complete. If he saves us from the burning fever, he saves us from the weakness that follows it, and when he deals with soul maladies, his cures are equally complete, there are no after-affects to the soul as there are in many diseases that afflict the body. When the great Physician restores the soul, he restores it completely.

32. *And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.*

It was the Sabbath, and they would not even bring out their sick folk until the day of rest was over. The Jewish Sabbath ended at the setting of the sun, so these people were all watching and waiting until the sun dipped below the horizon, and then, straightaway, they brought their suffering ones to Jesus. What a mass of misery filled the streets of Capernaum that memorable night! The whole city was turned into a hospital.

33. *And all the city was gathered together at the door.*

It seemed as if everybody had come either to be healed or to witness the healing of others: “All the city was gathered together at the door.” Oh, when shall we see our places of worship thronged in this fashion with the spiritually sick? When will this great city of London begin to turn towards the Lord Jesus Christ? Will any of us live to see all our fellow-citizens gathered together around the Savior to be healed by him of all the wounds that sin hath made?

34. *And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out*

many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.

They would persist in acknowledging him; perhaps with the design of injuring his cause, for nothing hurts the cause of Christ more than to have it praised by bad men or evil spirits. I do not know that an outrageous sinner, if he will not repent, can do Christ a better turn than to abuse him for then he is speaking after his own natural manner, but when the devil or his servants go into the pulpit, and begin to speak in praise of Christ, then is Christ's cause in an evil case indeed; so he "suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him."

35. *And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.*

His hard day's work probably ran on far into the night. Yet, "a great while before day," he was up at the sacred work of supplication. The more work we have to do with men for God, the longer we ought to be at work with God for men. If you plead with men, you cannot hope to prevail unless you first plead with God. And, inasmuch as our Lord had great success the day before, it teaches us that the greatest success does not release us from the necessity of still waiting upon God.

36-38. *And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him*

For he had endeavored to conceal himself in the loneliest spot that he could find. Possibly, the disciples overheard his groans, his cries, his supplications, as he poured out his very soul in prayer to his Father.

they said unto him, All men seek for thee. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.

preaching always to the forefront with him. Whatever he does not do, he does preach; and, though he works miracles such as casting out devils, he evidently

regards all bodily cures as subsidiary to his main work. Jesus Christ came forth from God the Father that he might proclaim throughout the land the message of redeeming grace and dying love.

39, 40. *And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils. And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

It is a pity that he could not go further than to say to Christ. “If thou wilt,” but it is a great mercy that he could go as far as that, so, if you cannot pray a prayer that is full of faith, pray one that has at least some faith in it. If you cannot go as far as some do, go as far as you can. Bless God for moonlight, and then he will give you sunlight; but for anyone to say, “I will not pray at all because I cannot pray as I would like to pray,” is a very foolish thing. Say what you can, even as this poor leper said to Jesus, “If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.”

41. *And Jesus, moved with compassion*

This is a wonderful expression: “moved with compassion.” The face of Jesus and his whole person showed that his very soul was stirred by an intense fellow-feeling for this poor leper.

put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

If you or I were to touch a leper, his uncleanliness would at once be communicated to us, but when Christ touches a leper, his cleanliness is communicated to the leper. Oh, how high our blessed Lord stands above us! When we have to deal with certain peculiarly sad cases, we ought to go to the work with much earnest prayer that we ourselves may not be contaminated by contact with gross sinners, but Christ has such virtue in himself that he can even touch the fevered and the leprous, and yet sustain no injury.

42. *And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed*

from him, and he was cleansed.

This was another very wonderful miracle. All that dryness of the skin, that scurf, that peeling, that inward foulness that eats into the bones, and pollutes the very current of the blood—all this was quite gone, the Lord Jesus Christ made this foul, unclean leper perfectly clean and whole in a single moment.

43, 44. *And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away; and saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those thing which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

That was all he was to do—to go and show himself to the priest, so that it might be officially known and certified that he was clean, and he was not to tell anyone else of his cure. He was disobedient to Christ; perhaps you will think that he was very naturally and excusably so, but we must never make excuses for doing what Christ tells us not to do. Our duty is not to judge whether such-and-such a course will be profitable or beneficial, but to consider whether such-and-such a course is in accordance with the Word of the Lord. This man ought to have held his tongue, for Christ had told him to do so. I have no doubt that he said within himself, "The more I talk about this miracle, the more good I shall do, and the more famous Christ's name will become." But he had no business to think that, his business was to obey Christ's command.

45. *But he went out, and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.*

There were such crowds that he could not work his miracles of healing. The disobedient man was no doubt moved by gratitude, which seems a very proper motive; yet his disobedience caused Christ serious inconvenience, and hindered his work; and I have no doubt that there are many things done in the Church of God today of which many say, "They are very proper, and very nice;" yes, but are they Scriptural? Did the Master command them? If not, they will cause him and his kingdom serious inconvenience and loss at some time or other. We

cannot too fully realize that, as Christ's disciples, we are to obey him implicitly; and the best proof of our gratitude is to do exactly as Christ bids us.

Mark 2

1. *And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house.*

It is a very singular fact that, although man, in his natural state of heart, is opposed to the gospel, yet he is drawn to hear it. Even though he abhors it, yet oftentimes he cannot help listening to it. Wherever Jesus Christ is, whether he is present in person, or in the preaching of the Word, it will be certain to be noised abroad, and multitudes will come to hear. The grandest attraction either in or out of heaven, is still the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. *And straightaway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.*

We expect to see the crowd round the door, but there was not room, even for the doorway hearers, when Jesus Christ was preaching. There is an attracting power about the voice of Jesus. We may expect that if we will let Jesus speak in the ministry, and not speak too much our own thought and our own words, there will still be the same attraction about the gospel. “He preached the Word unto them.”

3. *And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy,*

A paralyzed person: that is the exact word—one, who could not come himself, but had a very anxious desire to come. They came to him, bringing a paralytic.

which was borne of four.

His neighbors agreed to lift him.

4. *And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press,*

They had tried the door very many times, but could not possibly enter.

they uncovered the roof where he was:

They, perhaps, went up the stairway of the next house, and then from one fiat roof to another till they came to the top of the verandah which sheltered Christ while he preached to the people in the court.

and when they had broken it up,

For it does not seem to have been a very light structure, but to have required some labor; yet they broke it up.

they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

Where there is a will there is a way, and when there is no way a resolute will makes one. Better to come to Christ through the ceiling than not to come at all. Better to be let down to him by a rope than not to be in his presence.

5. *When Jesus saw their faith,*

For he has a very quick eye to faith: and though we do not read that they had said anything, and, therefore, they had not expressed their faith, yet this bold and venturous action in breaking up the roof and letting all the dust fall about the Savior’s head, not fearing that they should provoke him, but trusting in his gentleness and patience, showed their confidence that they had only to get the man where Christ could see him, and good would come of it.

he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

In Luke's account of this gathering, we read that "the power of the Lord was present to heal them," and when we ask, "Why was that power so remarkably present?" We think that one reason was, because there were persons present who were anxious about the good of others; and, today, wherever four persons come together praying for some poor soul, you may rest assured that the power of the Lord will there be present to heal. I do not think that so much of the success of sermons depends upon the preacher, as upon those model hearers who are all the while praying for a blessing, and who are making other members of the congregation—those who are converted—the constant subject of their supplication. Christ blessed this man because of the faith of the four who carried him, and possibly because of his own faith.

Notice that our Lord did not at first say to the sick man, "Thou art healed of thy palsy;" but he said, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." This was laying the axe at the root, because sin is at the bottom of sorrow; and where sin is pardoned, even the effects of sin will be removed.

6. *But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, And reasoning in their hearts.*

They had come with a bad motive. They wanted to find fault, and they took their seats that they might hear everything very carefully, take notes of it, and put it down, and make as much mischief of it as ever they could.

They had all their ears open. They did not know, however, that he could read their hearts, or they might not have been so forward in coming into his presence. They were "sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts."

7. *Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only.*

Which was quite true, but then he was God, and therefore it was not blasphemy. Blasphemy it would have been had he not been divine.

8, 9. *And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these*

things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk.

Do they not each require a divine power? If I be divine, I shall prove I am by healing this man. Then I have a right to say, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” Whichever is spoken, Omnipotence is implied. The presence and power of God alone could give efficacy to either sentence; but, to him, the one is as easy as the other.

10–12. *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.*

Admire and imitate the faith and the obedience of this paralytic. He did better than some, for there have been some who, out of very gratitude, have disobeyed Christ. I mean, when he said to one that he should not tell what Christ had done. He did tell it, but this man, though no doubt his gratitude would have prompted him to stay and throw himself at his benefactor’s feet, or to stop at least and sing a hymn of thankfulness to God, yet he knows that to obey is the best form of gratitude, and as Christ had told him, “Go thy way into thy house,” he did just that. The best thing to do for Christ is to do what Christ bids you. There are many glittering forms of gratitude, but all is not gold that glitters. The most golden gratitude is that which scrupulously renders obedience to every command of Jesus Christ. Take this to heart, and do ye so.

13. *And he went forth again by the sea side; and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.*

Better air than there was in the house, and more room, but he kept to the same gospel. He taught them.

14. *And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the receipt of custom, and said unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.*

Swept up his shekels—gathered up his account books—stopped no longer. He rose from taking toll to follow the Master. There is a change in the method of displaying Christ's power, but his power is always the same. To the palsied man, he said "Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk;" but to the man engaged in a calling which degraded him, Christ said, "Follow me;" and "he arose and followed him."

Blessed be God, still we have in our midst the living Lord, who is as able to work miracles of mercy today as when he was upon the earth; and we have not merely to exhort, to persuade, and to entreat, though we have to do all that, but we have also to speak with authority in the name of this glorious Son of God, and to command men to repent and believe in him. He is with us, by his Spirit, to make his Word mighty, so that, to this day, palsied men do arise, and walk, and sinful men are led to turn from evil, and to follow Christ.

15. *And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.*

In Matthew's house the Savior "sat at meat." The new convert most naturally called in his old friends, that they might have the advantage of our Lord's teaching: they would come to a supper more readily than to a sermon, and so he gave them a feast, and thus attracted them to the place where Jesus was. We may use all lawful means to bring others under the sound of the Word. A lot of the riff-raff came. "Sinner" by occupation, as well as sinners by character, ventured in to the publican's house, and dared to sit "with him and his disciples" as if they had been members of his society. Probably they had been Matthew's boon companions, and now he wished them to become his brothers in Christ. Our Lord willingly accepted Matthew's hospitality; for he desired to do good to those who most needed to be uplifted. He allowed persons of ill-fame to "sit down with him and his disciples."

16. *And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto Jesus' disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?*

Here was a fine opportunity for the sneering Pharisees. They insinuated that the Lord Jesus could be but a sorry person, since he drew such a rabble around him, and even allowed them to be his table-companions. They were very careful of their company when any saw them; for they thought that their superior holiness would be debased by allowing sinners to sit with them; and now they have a handy stone to throw at Jesus while he eats with publicans and sinners.

17. *When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

The Pharisees were cowardly enough to speak their cavil to his disciples rather than to the Master; but the Leader put himself in the front, and soon baffled the adversaries. His reasoning was overwhelming, and his justification ample. Where should a physician be but among the sick? Who should come to a doctor's house but those who are diseased? Thus our Lord was more than justified in being the center to which the morally sick should gather for their spiritual healing.

18. *And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?*

The disciples of John, like their leader, were ascetics; and therefore, like the Pharisees, abounded in fasts. They were scandalized because the disciples of Jesus were seen at feasts, and were not known to fast. They did not murmur in secret like the scribes, but had the matter out face to face. They came to him. Like honest friends, who felt hurt, they came to headquarters, and asked the Lord himself. This open expression prevented after-dissension, and it was therefore wise. When good men differ, it is well to refer the matter to the Lord himself. To agree to differ may be all very well, but to have the difference removed by explanation is better far.

19. *And Jesus said unto them, If the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.*

Here our Lord answered the second part of their enquiry; the first part they must answer on their own account. They knew, or ought to have known, why they and the Pharisees fasted. Why his disciples did not fast he proceeds to explain. He is "the Bridegroom" who came to woo and win his bride; those who followed him were the guests, the Bridegroom's best men and attendants; it was for them to rejoice while the Bridegroom headed their company; for sorrow is not suitable for wedding-feasts. Our Lord is that Bridegroom of whom Solomon sang in the Song of Songs, and we who enjoy his fellowship are one with him in his joy. Why should we fast while he is near? Can we allow little things to kill our great joy? Can we, in consistency with reason, and in harmony with respect for our Lord, mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with us?

20. *But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.*

But Jesus was to go. He says himself, "The Bridegroom shall be taken from them." Here first he speaks about his death. Did his disciples note the warning word? When their Beloved was gone, they would have fasting enough. How true was this! Sorrows crowded in upon them when he was gone. It is the same with us. Our Lord is our joy: his presence makes our banquet; his absence is our fast, black and bitter. All ritualistic fasting is the husk: the reality of fasting is known only to the child of the bridechamber when his Lord is no more with him. This is fasting indeed, as some of us know full well. There is no wedding without a Bridegroom, no delight without Jesus. In his presence is fullness of joy; in his absence is depth of misery. Let but the heart rest in his love and it desireth nothing more. Take away a sense of his love from the soul, and it is dark, empty, and nigh unto death.

21, 22. *The man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old and the rent is made worse. And so man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the*

bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.

The bottles were made of skin, and the wine put into them must be suitable. To prescribe fasting to his disciples, while he was making them glad with his personal presence, would have been incongruous and absurd; and there are some things that we ought not to expect from young Christians, and other things that we ought not to expect from old and mature Christians. We should not expect to find new wine in old bottles, nor old wine in new bottles. “A place for everything, and everything in its place,” is not only a rule for the home and the merchant’s counting-house, but it is also a rule which should be observed in the Church of Christ; for God, as a God of order, always puts things in their proper places, and in due order.

23. *And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and the disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.*

They had offended the Pharisees by not fasting, and now they were offending them again in a similar way, though with reference to a different matter.

24. *And the Pharisees said unto him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful?*

According to some Rabbis, you might pick an ear of wheat on the Sabbath-day, but if you rubbed it between your hands, they said that was a sort of thieving which was a kind of labor that must not be performed on the Sabbath. They made all sorts of ingenious restrictions, too ridiculous for us to quote. These disciples were therefore, according to them, chargeable with sin, because they had plucked ears of corn, and had performed the operation of threshing them on the Sabbath-day, and we have some of that sort of folk living now who take the smallest matter, which is altogether insignificant, and in which there is neither good nor harm, and magnify and distort it, and then make a man a grave offender all for next to nothing. We have learned not to be very much troubled by anything that they choose to say.

25, 26. *And he said unto them, have ye ever read what David did,*

when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiather the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?

He speaks to his learned opponents as if they had not read the law which they professed to uphold. “Have ye ever read?” The instance of David served the Son of David well. It was clear from his example that necessity has no law. The Tabernacle law was broken by David when he and his band were pressed with hunger; and that breach of law touched Jewish ritual in a very special and tender point, and yet he was never rebuked for it. To have eaten the holy bread out of profanity, or bravado, or levity, might have involved the offender in the judgment of death; but to do so in urgent need was not blameworthy in the case of David. As men excuse any breach of manners necessitated by the pressure of hunger, so doth the Lord permit any ceremonial point of law to give way to his mercy, and to man’s evident necessity. The law of the Sabbath was never meant to compel starvation to hungry men, any more than the law of “the house of God” and “the shewbread.” Works of necessity are lawful on the Sabbath.

27 *And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:*

He has made it to be no longer a day of bondage, but a day of blessed rest and holy service for God. Works of necessity, works of piety, and works of mercy, are not only allowed to be done, but are commanded to be done upon the Sabbath-day.

28. *Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.*

This sets the whole matter beyond further question. “The Son of man”, Christ Jesus, being in union with the Godhead, “is Lord” of everything which lies in the range of that law which concerns God and man, seeing he is Mediator; and therefore he may arrange and dispose of Sabbaths as he pleases. He has done so, and has interpreted the Sabbatic law, not with license, but with a sweet reasonableness which the more rigid of religionists do not exhibit. From his example and teaching we learn that the Sabbath is not profaned by works of

necessity, piety, or mercy; and that we need not care for the sharp speeches of hypercritical formalists who strain the Sabbatic law, and make a bondage of that which was intended to be a season of holy rest.

Mark 3

1, 2. *And he entered again into the synagogue;*

Jesus set the example of attending public worship. The synagogues had no divine appointment to authorize them, but in the nature of things it must be right and good to meet for the worship of God on his own day, and therefore Jesus was there. He had nothing to learn, yet he went up to the assembly on the day which the Lord God had hallowed.

and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him.

It was remarkable that so very soon a case occurred to bring up again the matter in dispute. Did the Pharisees bring the man with the withered hand into the synagogue so as to raise the question in a practical form? They went to the synagogue to indulge their bigotry and not to worship: it is to be feared that many in these days imitate them. They were on the catch; yet they took nothing by their malicious craft.

3. *And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth.*

The man was sitting down, and Jesus bade him stand up that all might observe him.

4, 5. *And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.*

And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

Thus our Lord practically carried out his own teaching. He that could work a miracle of this sort was divine, and could rightly interpret his own law. It does not appear that his arm was withered, as some have supposed; but he was able, by the use of his arm to hold out his hand to public view. This being done, the Lord restored it at once, before the whole synagogue, and before the captious Pharisees. The man stretched out each finger perfectly restored to its natural vigor. The poor man had hidden his hand when it was dried up; but when restored, it was meet that it should be seen by all in the synagogue. By that restored hand, made whole on the sabbath, all men knew that Jesus would work deeds of mercy on the sabbath.

Let us pray him to do the same in our assemblies. Oh, that the hands which have been useless for holy purposes may at his bidding become whole! Oh, that those who are bidden to believe and live would cease from questioning, and obey, as this man did; then would healing his surely come to them, as it did to the obedient man!

6. *And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.*

The synagogue was too hot for the Pharisees, and so they went out. Utterly routed, they retire from public gaze, hating the man who had so completely baffled them. They could not silence him, and so they would slay him. Those who begin with seeking to accuse the Lord soon come to seeking to destroy him. It was not easy to touch one who lived so much in the esteem of the people, and so they consulted together as to the safest method of procedure. Their killing of Jesus was indeed the result of malice aforethought, for they deliberately planned their cruel deed. Men at this hour still take counsel “against him.” Why and wherefore? Let their own consciences answer, if they have any. The present cool, calculating attacks of skeptics upon the gospel have a special degree of crime in them.

7, 8. *But Jesus withdrew himself with his disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed him, and from Judaea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumaea, and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him.*

Their secret counsels were all discerned by his omniscience: Jesus knew it. He acted accordingly. He came not to contend with cavilers, and therefore he withdrew himself from the scene of their perpetual disputations. But he could not get alone; the crowd flocked after him.

Such a teacher is sure to have a following. Yet how small his spiritual following compared with the "great multitude" who outwardly came to him! Our King has many nominal subjects; but few there are who know him as their Lord, so as to be renewed in heart by the power of his grace: these along enter truly into his kingdom, and it is foolish and wicked to talk of including any others in his spiritual domain. Yet is it a hopeful sign when there is a great inquiry after Jesus, and every region and city yields its quota to the hearing throng.

9. *And he spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him.*

Great multitudes longed to hear his teaching, and see his miracles. These pressed upon him so eagerly that there was danger of his being pushed into the sea; and the more so because it was not a scattered crowd, but they were gathered together unto him—pressing about his person.

10. *For he had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues.*

Our Lord was not content with miracles for the body, he had the gospel for the soul, that gospel which lies in his own person as King, in his promise of pardon to believers, and in his rule of love over those who are loyal to him. To this gospel the miracles of healing were so many seals.

11, 12. *And unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. And he straitly charged them that they should not make him known.*

Perhaps they thought that their testimony would tend to blacken his character. We are, in a sense, pleased when bad men find fault with us, for that is really the best commendation that they can give us; but when they begin to praise us, we feel suspicious that there is something wrong. We think of how Christ acted when the devils said to him, “Thou art Christ, the Son of God,” and we would fain have them hold their tongues. What a vile thing sin is, for it makes even good words to be evil when they come out of sinful lips!

13-15. *And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils:*

See the way of making apostles. They were first disciples, and afterwards teachers of others: they were specially his, and then they were given to be a blessing to men. They were “called unto him”; and thus their higher call came to them. In the presence of their Lord they received their equipment: “to have power.” Is that so with us in our own special office? Let us come to him, that we may be clothed with his authority and girded with his strength.

Their power was miraculous; but it was an imitation of their Lord’s, and the words applied to it are very much the same as we have seen in use about his miracles of healing. The twelve were made to represent their Lord. We, too, may be enabled to do what Jesus did among men. Oh, for such an endowment!

16. *And Simon he surnamed Peter;*

The first, for he generally put himself first, and was by his energy and ability most fittingly the leader, “Simon he surnamed Peter”, “a stone”; and a right solid stone he came to be.

17, 18. *And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and he surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder, and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite,*

It seems probable that Bartholomew is Nathanael, whom Philip led to Jesus: they are well put together. Bartholomew is never mentioned without an and: he was a kind of man to work with other people.

Thomas was as truly called by the Lord as any of them, though he was one whose mind entertained distressing questions.

19. *And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him: and they went into an house.*

What a description to follow a name — "which also betrayed him"! God grant it may never be set after the name of any one of us!

The apostolic number fitly represents the twelve tribes of Israel; and for practical purposes the twelve form a workable band of leaders, a sufficient jury, and a competent company of witnesses.

20, 21. *And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.*

He dared such peril; he so boldly opposed established authorities, he spoke such mysterious truths, and he was altogether so unearthly, that his friends began to think that his mind had failed him.

22. *And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.*

Of course, they had some bitter sentence ready. Nothing was too bad for them to

say of Jesus. They were hard pressed when they took to this statement, which our Lord in another place so easily answered. They hinted that such power over demons must have come to him through an unholy compact with “the prince of the devils.” Surely this was going very near to the unpardonable sin.

23-26. *And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.*

The Thought-reader meets them with an argument in the highest degree conclusive, overwhelming them by reducing their statement to absurdity. Imagine Satan divided against Satan, and his kingdom thus rent with civil war! No: whatever faults the devils have, they are not at strife with each other; that fault is reserved for the servants of a better Master. Oh, that divisions in the church were not so many, and so desolating as they are! It would be a very hopeful circumstance if we could hear of divisions among the powers of darkness; for then would Satan’s kingdom fall. No, ye cunning Pharisees; your slanderous suggestion is too manifestly a lie, and reasonable men are not to be entrapped by it!

27. *No man can enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he will first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house.*

The devil is the strong man, the giant robber. He holds men in possession as a warrior over his property. There is no getting his goods from him without first encountering himself. The bare idea of spoiling him while you are his friend, or he is unsubdued, is ridiculous. Our Lord, when his work began, bound Satan: the presence of God in human flesh was a restraint upon man’s foe. Having bound the enemy, he now takes out of his house those spoils which else had been for ever in his possession. There is no deliverance for us save by our Lord’s victory over our powerful tyrant. Glory be to his name, he has bound the mighty, and he takes from him his prey! This was our Lord’s fair and self-evident explanation of the matter concerning which Pharisees theorized so basely.

28-30. *Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.*

Why should a word be spoken against Jesus? Yet many words are so spoken, and he forgives. But when it comes to willfully confounding the Holy Spirit with the evil spirit, the offense is rank, and heinous, and most hardening to the heart. In no state of the divine economy was it ever possible to extend forgiveness to one who willfully regarded God himself as in league with the devil. This is spiritual death, nay, rottenness and corruption of the most putrid kind. It is no error, but a wicked, willful blasphemy of the Holy Ghost which dares to impute his works of grace and power to diabolical agency. He who is guilty of this outrageous crime has sinned himself into a condition in which spiritual feeling is dead, and repentance has become morally impossible.

Here is a solemn warning for these slanderous Pharisees: the sin of reviling the Spirit of God, and imputing his work to Beelzebub, is a very great one; and, in fact, so hardens the heart that men who are guilty of it never repent, and consequently are never forgiven. Our Lord let his opponents see whither they were drifting: they were on the verge of a sin for which no pardon would be possible. We must be very tender in our conduct towards “the Holy Ghost”; for his honor has a special guard set about it by such a solemn text as this.

31. *There came then his brethren and his mother, and, standing without, sent unto him, calling him.*

The members of his family had come to take him, because they thought him beside himself. No doubt the Pharisees had so represented his ministry to his relatives that they thought they had better restrain him, lest he should procure his own destruction by his zealous preaching.

How dare they act in this manner? By the request of his mother and his brethren he is called away from the pressing engagement of teaching the people, which was his urgent lifework; but the call had no power over him. What ailed Mary that she joined in this transaction? Many a nervous mother has been ready to

hold back her consecrated son when his courage has defied danger. Our Lord did not allow his love to his mother to turn him aside.

32. *And the multitude sat about him, and they said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee.*

It is hard when interruptions come from our own flesh and blood; for strangers are sure to back them up. Ignorantly or willfully, the reporting person lent himself to the design of the relatives by representing that they were desiring to speak with him; though, indeed, they desired to take him. He who would not permit a disciple to neglect his duty on the plea of burying his father, how will he act now that his mother comes to hinder him? He will do the right thing. We may always find the rule of our conduct by asking the question, “What would Jesus do?”

33, 34. *And he answered them, saying, Who is my mother, or my brethren? And he looked round about on them which sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!*

He does not reject the tender ties of his human nature, but he exhibits their true position as secondary to the spiritual bonds which united him to the spiritual family. Those who were related to him by the bonds of discipleship had in this the truest union with him. He pointed to his disciples, and said, “Behold my mother and my brethren!” All believers in Jesus are of the royal family, princes of the blood, brothers of the Christ. See how he owns the affinity, and bids all know it. “He is not ashamed to call them brethren.” In this instance his method of acknowledging them was singularly striking; he even set them before his earthly mother and brethren.

35. *For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.*

He enlarges upon the truth. Every doer of the Father’s will is thereby proved to be a true disciple, and he is to Jesus as near as a brother, as dear as a sister, as much cared for as mother. According to our condition and capacity, let us act towards our Lord the part of brother in help, of sister in sympathy, of mother in

tender love; for all these relationships act in both ways, and involve giving as well as receiving. What a blessed “whosoever” is this! It is not for ministers only, or for persons set apart to special service; but all who do the Father’s will in any position of life are encompassed in the family circle of the Lord Christ.

Our Lord Jesus had a little while before cut himself adrift from the bands of formality by routing the scribes and Pharisees, and now the knife goes deeper, and all that is of the flesh at its very best is divided from that which is of the spirit. Henceforth it is clear that after the flesh he knows no man any more; neither can we hope to know him by birthright membership, or anything else that is of blood, or birth, or of the will of the flesh. The inner life which is akin to God, and shows itself in holiness, is that which gives us union with our Lord. Oh, to feel its influence more and more!

Mark 4

1. *And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.*

You can easily picture that scene—the Master sitting down in the vessel, with a little breathing space of water between himself and the crowd, and then the multitude on the rising bank, standing one above another, and all gazing upon the Teacher who sat down and taught them.

2, 3. *And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine, Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:*

He did not go out to show himself, to let people see how dexterous he was at the art of sowing seed; but he "went out to sow." And every true preacher should go out with this one design—to scatter broadcast the good seed of the kingdom, and to try to obtain for it an entrance into the hearts of their hearers.

4. *And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.*

He could not help that; it was not his fault, but the fault of the way side and of the fowls. So, when the Word of God is denied entrance into men's hearts, if it be faithfully preached, the preacher shall not be blamed by his Master; the fault shall lie between the hard heart that will not let the seed enter in and the devil who came and took it away.

5, 6. *And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and*

immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root it withered away.

Among the rocks, or on the shallow soil, with the unbroken rock-pan underneath, the seed fell; for if the sower had altogether avoided such places he might have missed some of the good ground. In these stony places the seed speedily sprang up because the rock gave it all the heat that fell on it, and so hastened its germination. But, soon up, soon down. When the time came for the sun to put forth his force, the rootless plants instantly pined and died. “It had no depth of earth;” what could they do but wither quite away? Everything was hurried with them; the seeds had no time to root themselves, and so in hot haste the speedy growth met with speedy death. No trace remained.

7. *And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.*

The ground was originally a thornbrake, and had been cleared by the thorns being cut down; but speedily the old roots sent out new shoots, and other weeds came up with them; and the tangled beds of thistles, thorns, nettles, and whatnot, strangled the feeble up-shootings of the wheat. The native plants choked the poor stranger. They would not permit the intrusive corn to share the field with them: evil claims a monopoly of our nature.

Thus we have seen three sorts of seed come to an untimely end.

8. *And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.*

Thank God for that! There were three failures, but there was one success; or, perhaps we might more correctly say, three successes. There were three sorts of ground that yielded nothing, but at last the sower came to a piece of soil that had been well prepared, and therefore was good ground, which yielded fruit, though the quantity varied even there: “some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.”

9. *Had he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

Some people have ears, but they have not “ears to hear.” They have ears, but they close them to that which they ought to hear. When a man is really willing to listen to the truth, then may God help him to listen with all his heart, and spiritually!

10–12. *And when he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve asked of him the parable. And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables:*

The usual reasons for the use of parable would be to make truth clear, to arrest attention, and to impress teaching upon the memory. But in this instance our Lord was, by his parabolic speech, fulfilling the judicial sentence which had been long before pronounced upon the apostate nation among whom he received such unworthy treatment. They were doomed to have the light and to remain willfully in the dark. To his own disciples our Lord would explain the parable, but not to the outside unbelieving throng. If any one among the multitude became sincerely anxious to know the Lord’s meaning, he would become his disciple, and then he would be taught “the mystery of the kingdom of God”; but those who rejected the Messiah would, while listening to parables, hear and not hear, see and not perceive.

To hear the outward word is a common privilege; “to know the mystery” is a gift of sovereign grace. Our Lord speaks the truth with much boldness: “Unto you it is given”, “but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables.” Solemn words. Humbling truths. Salvation, and the knowledge by which it comes, are given as the Lord wills. There is such a thing as distinguishing grace after all; let the moderns revile the doctrine as they may.

12. *That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.*

This judicial blindness had happened to the Jews; they had so long closed their

eyes to the light that, at last, God closed them, and they were blinded.

They had refused to heed so many messages sent to them from the great God that, at last, this sentence was pronounced as the punishment of their sin—that they should die in their sins, and that even the preaching of the Word by the mouth of the Lord Jesus himself should be of no use to them.

That is one of the most awful judgments that can ever happen to anyone, when God puts a curse even on a man's blessings; and when the gospel, which should be a savor of life unto life, becomes a savor of death unto death.

13. *And he said unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?*

"For this is one of the simplest of them all; if you do not understand this parable, what will you understand?"

14, 15. *The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the wayside, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts,*

There is always a bird where there is a seed lying on the road, and there is always a devil where there is a sermon heard, but not received into the heart. "Satan cometh immediately." He is very prompt; we may delay, but the devil never does: "When they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts."

16, 17. *And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution, ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.*

These are the people that trouble and grieve the hearts of earnest ministers; and there are some revivalists who never go to a place without getting quite a lot of

persons to come forward and say that they are converted. Why, I know a town where, according to the accounts that were put forth by certain preachers, there were so many professed converts every night that all the people in the town must have been converted, and a good many more from the surrounding villages; but nobody can find them now. Were they converted, then? I trow not; but that is the style in which much has been done by some whom I might name. Yet there is some good even in their work.

The sower in the parable is not blamed because his work was so evanescent; how could he prevent it? As the soil was so shallow, the apparent result was very quick, and the disappointment was equally quick.

18, 19. *And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.*

The seed cannot grow in such soil as that. The man is too busy, or he is wholly taken up with pleasure; the women are too proud of themselves, or even of the clothes that cover them. How can there be room for Christ in the inn when it is crowded with other guests?

20. *And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirty fold, some sixty, and some an hundred.*

All converts are not equally good. I am afraid that, in our churches, there is a large number of the thirty-fold people. We are glad to have them, but they are not very brilliant Christians. Oh, for some sixty-fold converts—some who are fit to be very leaders in the Church of God! And when we get up to a hundred-fold—when it is not merely one hundred per cent., but one hundred gathered for every one sown—then are we indeed rejoiced. When everything that is good is multiplied over, and over, and over, and over, and over again, a hundred for one, and when each one of that hundred bears another hundred, that is the blessing we long to see.

This hundred-fold seed has in it the capacity for almost boundless multiplication; at the first sowing, we get a hundred-fold return; but what comes of the next sowing, and the next, and the next? God send us this style of wheat. May we have a great quantity of it!

21. *And he said unto them, Is a candle brought to be put under a bushel, or under a bed? and not to be set on a candlestick?*

So this wheat, then, is meant to be sown; the Word of God is intended to be spread. If it were put under a bed, it would set the bed on fire; and so, if you have true grace in your heart, there is nothing that can smother its light; the fire and the light together will force their way out.

22, 23. *For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad. If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*

Tell out, then, what God has told to you; and let everybody hear from you the truth as you yourself have heard it. See the compound interest that there is to be in this blessed trading for Christ.

24, 25. *And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.*

When the gospel is not received, when a man refuses it, it becomes a positive loss to him. There is a way by which it so works that, what a man thought he had, disappears. Some have been made worse by the preaching of that Word which ought to have made them better. May it not be so with any one of us!

26-29. *And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the*

earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.

"So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground": this the gracious worker can do. "And the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how": this is what he cannot do, it belongs to a higher power. Man can neither make the seed spring nor grow up, he is out of the field in that respect, and may go home "to sleep, and rise night and day."

Seed once sown is beyond human jurisdiction, and is under divine care. Yet ere long the worker comes in again—"When the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle." We can reap in due season, and it is both our duty and privilege so to do. You see, then, that there is a place for the worker at the beginning, and though there is no room for him in the middle passage, yet another opportunity is given him farther on when that which he sowed has actually yielded fruit.

30-32. *And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.*

Mustard seed is the least of all seeds in proportion to that which comes of it; but it has a peculiar life in it, and therefore it produces so great a growth. The man in the parable we know: his field is the church, or the heart; he takes the seed which, perhaps, others neglect because they think it so small; he sows the living seed in his own field, and watches over it. It grows and grows, till at length it becomes the greatest among herbs, and is like to a tree. The results of the divine life in the soul are by no means little; but great graces, great projects, and great deeds are produced by it. The work of grace in the church and in the individual, is so apparent, that persons who know as little about heavenly things as linnets and sparrows, come and find shelter beneath the holy and beneficent influences and institutions which are its outgrowth.

We could not have guessed that our Lord and his twelve apostles would produce the myriad churches of Christendom. We cannot even now tell whereto a humble effort to do good may grow. We know not to what our own inner life will come. It has an expanding power within it, and it will burst every bond, and grow to a thing which will cast shadow, yield fruit, and lend shelter. If the Lord has planted the incorruptible seed within, its destiny is a great one.

33, 34. *And with many such parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples.*

Our Lord speaks hidden things, and sets forth secret things in an open parable, which is understood by those who have had the eyes of their understanding opened, while those who are self-blinded perceive not his meaning. These parables contain ancient secrets and deep mysteries; and, may be, there is more of prophecy in them than we have yet perceived.

35. *And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.*

He ran away from popularity. Having healed all that were sick, the royal Physician sought to begin practice on fresh ground. He saw the crowds becoming dangerous, and perhaps too enthusiastic, and so he took ship for the further shore to be away from their rash acts. Too often we court the notoriety which our Lord avoided. Is it not because we are swayed by inferior motives, which had no power over him? We ought not to keep to the side where we get flattery, but we should “depart unto the other side” to begin fresh work. Moreover, “the other side” may be the side which needs us most, and it is right even to leave a multitude which have had their share of privilege to go to a smaller company who have had no time of gracious opportunity.

36. *And when they had sent away the multitude*

Telling them that Christ would give them no more instruction that day, and that they had better go back to their homes. There are some preachers who have great

gifts of dispersion, it does not take them long to scatter a congregation; but I expect that Christ's disciples found it to be no easy task to send away the crowds that had been listening to their Master's wondrous words. But, "when they had sent away the multitude,"—

they took him even a he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.

Christ was Lord High Admiral of the Galilean lake that night, and he had quite a little fleet of vessels around his flagship.

37. *And there arose a great storm of wind*

Our friend, John Macgregor, "Rob Roy," tells us that the lake is subject to very sudden and severe storms; it lies in a deep hollow, and down from the surrounding ravines and valleys the air comes with a tremendous rush seldom experienced even upon a real sea; for this was, of course, only a tattle lake though sometimes called a sea. I have been told that, on some Scotch lochs, the wind will occasionally come from three or four quarters at once, lifting the boat bodily out of the water, and sometimes seeming to lift the water up towards heaven, with the boat and all in it; so was it, that night, when "there arose a great storm of wind,"—

and the wave beat into the ship, so that it was now full.

No doubt they baled out the boat with all their might, and did their best to prevent it from sinking, yet "it was now full of water." But where was their Lord and Master, and what was he doing while the storm was raging?

38. *And he was in the under part of the ship, asleep on a pillow:*

He was quite at home upon the wild waves,—"Rocked in the cradle of the deep,"—for winds and waves were but his Father's servants, obeying his commands. "He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow;" doubtless weary and worn with the labors of the day. We do not always think enough of the

weariness of Christ's human body. There was not only the effort of preaching, but his preaching was so full of high thought, and the expressions he used were so pregnant with meaning, that it must have taken much out of him to preach thus from the heart, with intense agony of spirit, and with his brain actively at work all the while. Remember that he was truly man as well as the Son of God, and that what he did was of so high an order, not to be reached by any of us, that it must have exhausted him and therefore he needed sleep to refresh him; and there he was wisely taking it, and serving God by sleeping soundly, and thus preparing himself for the toil of the following day.

38. *And they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?*

He was not flurried: his trust in his great Father was so firm, that, rocked in the cradle of the deep, he slept peacefully. Winds howled, and waters dashed over him; but he slept on. His disciples caused him more disquiet than the storm. They "awoke him" with their cries. They were mistrustful, and ready to upbraid him with indifference.

39. *And he arose, and rebuked the wind*

When our Lord rebuked the winds, he did in the best manner rebuke their unbelief. He has very happy ways of correcting us by the greatness of His mercy to us.

And said unto the sea, Peace, be still.

Can you not almost fancy that you can hear that commanding voice addressing the raging, roaring, tumultuous winds and waves?

And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

Not only was the wind quieted, and the sea hushed to slumber, but a deep, dead, mysterious calm transformed the lake into a molten looking glass.

When Christ stills winds and waves, it is “a great calm.” Did you ever feel “a great calm”? It is much more than ordinary peace of mind; it is to your heart as if there were no further possibilities of fear. Your troubles have so completely gone that you can scarcely recollect them. There is no one but the Lord himself who can speak so to produce “a great calm.” Master, we entreat thee to speak such a calm so that for those of us who need it.

40. *And he said unto them*

When he had calmed the winds and the waves, he had to speak to another fickle set, more fickle than either winds or waves:

Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?

He questions the disciples. Alas, they had questioned him in an unworthy sense! Their unbelief was grievous to the Lord Jesus. They ought to have believed him, and it was an injury to his perfect love that they should so readily mistrust him, or even mistrust him at all. How could they think that he would let them sink? He was in the vessel with them: did they suppose that, after all, he was a mere pretender to Deity, and that the ship would go down with him on board?

41. *And they feared exceedingly*

They went from one fear to another, but this time it was the fear of awe—a hallowed dread of what might happen to a ship which had “oh a mysterious Person on board. Though there was probably in their minds no fear of death, it seemed to them a fearsome thing to live in the presence of One who had such power over the raging elements.” They feared exceedingly—

41. *And said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*

It was well that they wondered; it would have been better had they adored. If Christ had been only man, the wonder about him would have been beyond all wonderment. He was divine, and hence to his royal word all nature yielded. This

is the end of the wonder of the intellect, but it is the beginning of the worship of the heart. In this case, our glorious King for the moment unveiled his glory, and commanded obedience from the most boisterous of the elements. In our own cases how often have we had to cry out, “What manner of man is this!” How grandly has he brought us through terrible storms! How easily has he calmed the surges of our souls! Blessed be his name! Still “the wind and the sea obey him.”

Mark 5

1. *And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.*

They had had a very eventful passage across that small but stormy sea, and Christ had proved himself to be the Lord High Admiral of the seas; but now that he steps ashore they are to see his power quite as distinctly displayed as upon the stormy wave.

And when he was come out of the ship, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit

Our Lord crossed the Sea of Galilee on purpose to rescue this poor man from the power of the unclean spirit that possessed him. He knew that there were many who needed him on the Galilean side of the lake, and he could foresee the storm that would threaten to sink the little ship; yet he calmly said to his disciples, “Let us pass over unto the other side.” As soon as the great Physician landed, a dreadful apparition appeared. “Our of the tombs”, an uncanny place, rushed a man, howling and yelling like some wild beast; or worse still, under the influence of Satan, who had taken possession of him.

3. *Who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no man could bind him, no, not with chains:*

Those ancient graveyards were in remote places, for the people were too wise to bury their dead inside their cities. Very often, the tombs were hewn in caverns in the sides of hills and rocks, and here the dead were laid. Of course, every man who touched a tomb was thereby ceremonially defiled, so that the tombs were fit places for an unclean person possessed by an unclean spirit. What a ghastly

dwelling-place! What a grim abode for the man, and yet most fitting, for he was dangerous to all who passed by—a raving lunatic, who could not be restrained by any bonds or chains that could be put upon him!

4. *Because that he had been often bound with fetters and chains, and the chained had been plucked asunder by him, and the fetters broken in pieces: neither could any man tame him.*

See how the world deals with furiously guilty men. It tries to fetter them, or else to tame them; to keep them in check by fear of punishment, or else to subdue them to a gentleness of morality: poor work this! Christ neither binds nor tames; he changes and renews. Oh, that everywhere his aid were sought, and not so much reliance placed on the fetters of law, or the power of morals!

5. *And always, night and day, he was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones.*

What a pitiful object this poor creature must have been—a terror to the whole region! So far as man was concerned, he was in an utterly hopeless condition; yet there was hope for him, for Jesus had crossed the sea apparently with the special purpose of healing him. Our Saviour had proved his power over the winds and waves, and he was about to show that demons were equally subject to his control.

6. *But when he saw Jesus afar off, he ran and worshipped him,*

The devil does not like doing it; but if it will serve his purpose, he will pretend to be a worshipper of Christ. He comes here sometimes; he goes to all sorts of places of worship, and makes men turn worshippers who have no worship in their hearts; for there is no end to the depth of his cunning, and many are they that have served the devil best when they have pretended to worship Christ.

7. *And cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou son of the Most High God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.*

Who was speaking then? The man himself, or the devil within him? It is very hard to tell; the man and the devil were two personalities, but they were so effectually blended into one that it is scarcely possible to tell when it was the man speaking, and when it was the devil. So, when sin enters into a man, it gets so completely into his very nature that, sometimes, we feel it must be the evil spirit speaking in the man, and yet it is not easy to be quite sure that it is so, and we cannot free the man himself from the guilt of his words and actions.

8. *For he said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.*

Christ never wastes words over the devil. He speaks to him very shortly and very sharply. It would be well sometimes if we could be more laconic when we are dealing with evil. It does not deserve our words as it did not observe Christ's words. Jesus said to the devil, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit."

9. *And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.*

The devil is obliged to tell his name when Christ treats him like a catechized child, and he is compelled to crouch before Christ like a whipped cur at his master's feet.

10. *And he besought him much that he would not send them away out of the country.*

The devil can pray; he did so in this case. It is not because a man is fluent in prayer that we are sure of his salvation. It is not because a man prays with such fervor that his knees knock together, that we may conclude that he is a saint. It may be that he is trembling through fear of God's judgment.

11, 12. *Now there was there nigh unto the mountains a great herd of swine feeding. And all the devils besought him, saying, Send us into the swine, that we may enter into them.*

Satan would rather vex swine than do no mischief at all. He is so fond of evil

that he would work it upon animals if he cannot work it upon men.

But notice their unanimity; with all the faults that can be laid at the door of demons, you cannot find them divided and quarrelling. They are unanimous in evil, and it is a shame that those who are the followers of Christ should often be divided, whereas the kingdom of Satan is not divided against itself. Let us learn from our great enemy at least this one lesson.

13. *And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand;) and were choked in the sea.*

It is clear from this narrative that the demons knew that Jesus was the Son of the most high God, and that he had absolute power to do with them whatever he pleased. It is else clear that they believed in prayer, and that they were all agreed in their supplication to him; and it is significant that Jesus granted their request: "Send us into the swine, that we mad enter into them." There was a certain congruity in the unclean spirit entering into the unclean animals, so "forthwith Jesus gave them leave."

14, 15. *And they that fed the swine fled,*

At which we do not at all wonder. Who would not flee when they thus saw the power of Christ?

and told it in the city, and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that was done. And they came to Jesus, and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

You would have thought that it would have been said, "They marvelled, and they praised Christ for this great and wonderful deed." No, "They were afraid." If you see another converted, do not be afraid; but rather have hope that you may be saved yourself. What a beautiful sight these people saw: "they come to Jesus,

and see him that was possessed with the devil, and had the legion, sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind."! That thought ought to have made them rejoice instead of being afraid. There are still people who are afraid of what will happen when they see those whom Christ has blessed spiritually as he had healed this man.

16. *And they that saw it told them how it befell to him that was possessed with the devil, and also concerning the swine.*

You may be sure that they dwelt upon the latter part of the story, for the loss of the swine touched them more than the healing of the demoniac.

17. *And they began to pray him to depart out of their coasts.*

Here is a second prayer in which many united, a very foolish and wicked prayer, yet the Saviour did as these people wished. He would not force his company upon those who wanted him to go, so he at once turned his face to the ship that he might "depart out of their coasts."

18. *And when he was come into the ship*

Christ will go from you if you want him to go. He forces himself upon no man; the grace of God does not violate e will of man, it acts in accordance with man's nature, and achieves the divine purpose without disturbing the individuality of the man.

he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him.

Was not that a proper prayer? I think, dear friends, that not only nature, but the man's new nature must have suggested this petition; he prayed Christ that he might be with him. In our day, it is very natural that, as soon as we are converted, we should wish to go home to heaven; but what is the reason why we should not do so? It is in order that we may bear witness for Christ here on earth, and gather in others unto him.

19. *Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*

That is one of the chief points on which we ought always to speak, not only to tell of the greatness of the change which the grace of God has wrought in us, but especially to testify to the tenderness of God to us. Oh, how gently did he handle our broken bones! That good Physician of ours has a lion's heart, but he has a lady's hand; he does not spare us needful pain, but he never inflicts even a twinge that is unnecessary. And, oh! the pity of his heart toward us when he sees the sorrow which our sin has brought upon us.

20. *And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all men did marvel.*

He was told to publish what great things the Lord had done for him. He went and published what great things Jesus had done for him. Did he make any mistake? Oh, no! It is but another name for the same Person: for Jesus is the Lord; and when you speak of him as divine, and talk of him in terms fit only for God, you do but speak rightly; for so he deserveth to be praised. "And all men did marvel." So our Lord left them all wondering.

Leaving this one messenger to bear testimony to him, he went his way elsewhere, to carry blessings to many others on the other side of the sea. The man appears to have gone through the wide district that bore the name Decapolis, and his testimony to the power of Christ was so convincing that, when the Savior revisited that part of the country, he had a very different reception from that which he received on this occasion.

21. *And when Jesus was passed over again by ship unto the other side, much people gathered unto him: and he was nigh unto the sea.*

How many missionary voyages Jesus made, sometimes to one side of the sea, sometimes to the other side! What an example of holy diligence he is to us! So long as he lived here below, he never ceased to labor for he never ceased to love.

22. *And, behold, there cometh one of the rulers of the synagogue, Jairus by name; and when he saw him, he fell at his feet,*

It was an unusual thing for a ruler of the synagogue to be at the feet of Jesus, yet that is the best place for us all. If God has placed any of you m an eminent position, it will well become you to fall at the feet of Jesus as Jairus did. There is no place more suitable, no place more honorable, no place more profitable, than at the feet of Jesus.

What brought Jairus there? It was his great necessity; and that is what will bring us there, a sense of our great need.

23. *And besought him greatly, saying, My little daughter lieth at the point of death: I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed; and she shall live.*

This was great faith, yet it was also little faith, for he limits Christ's power to his bodily presence, and he stipulates about the way in which the cure is to be wrought: "I pray thee, come and lay thy hands on her, that she may be healed." Yet we never like to criticize faith, there is so little of it, and it is so precious a thing that we are glad to see it anywhere, and especially in a ruler of the synagogue. Oh, that we all prayed thus for our little daughters and our little sons: "Lord, come and lay thy hands on them! There is sin in them, and sin means spiritual death, come and lay thy hands on them, that they may be healed, and live for ever."

24-28. *And Jesus went with him;*

He will always regard true prayer; if we can believe, Jesus will come.

and much people followed him, and thronged him. And a certain woman

There were many in the throng around Jesus who did not touch him, and there were many who touched him, but not as she did; so she is singled out from the

crowd: “A certain woman,”

which had an issue of blood twelve years, and had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, when she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.

Was this woman sent, do you think, to encourage the faith of Jairus? It has been well said that the child of Jairus had been twelve years living, but this woman had been twelve years dying, so, if Christ could heal the woman who had been twelve years dying, he could raise the child who had been twelve years living. It is significant that there should have been this equalization of the number of years in the two oases. Although Jairus seemed strong in faith, he was not really so. He put the best side of his faith forward; while this woman, who was strong in faith, yet coming behind Christ, and touching him as it were by stealth, put the worst side of her faith forward. We have known this to be the ease in others, some who seem to be strong in faith are none too strong, and some who seem to be very weak in faith are much stronger than they seem.

29–31. *And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of that plague. And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciple said unto him, Thou seest the multitude thronging thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?*

They spoke too fast, as we also sometimes do, it would have been well if they had said nothing which looked like questioning their Master’s word.

32, 33. *And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.*

The miracle had been wrought in her, yet she was fearing and trembling because she perceived the imperfection of her way of approaching the Saviour. Probably, after we are saved, we see more of our mistakes than we did before; and when the blessing really comes to us, we begin to be anxious lest we should lose Christ because of some misapprehension in our way of finding him. The woman "fell down before him, and told him all the truth."

34. *And he said unto her, Daughter,*

This was a very unusual way for Christ to speak to a woman, so careful was he in his speech, but then she was a very exceptional woman.

thy faith hath made thee whole, go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.

Faith sent its message, and love returned the answer. She "was made whole", and she knew it; but she feared when she was found out lest she should lose the blessing and earn a curse. This fear soon vanished: Jesus called her "daughter." He fathered her because he had created faith in her. It was his garment which she touched, but it was her faith which had touched it; therefore our Lord said, "Thy faith hath made thee whole"; and thus he put the crown upon the head of her faith, because her faith had already set the crown on his head.

35. *While he yet spake, there came from the ruler of the synagogue's house certain which said, Thy daughter is dead: why troublest thou the Master any further?*

This ruler of the synagogue was on the brink of getting the blessing he sought, and then the very worst news comes to him. It may be that just now some of you have seemed to receive the sentence of death to all your hopes, yet you are on the very verge of getting the blessing. It is often so; just when the devil knows that the blessing is near, he struggles the hardest with the soul that is seeking it. Do not be cast down if that sentence of death comes to you, but still believe.

36. *As soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, he saith unto the*

ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, only believe.

As much as to say—"That is all you can do, and all you need do. Just trust me. Be not staggered if death itself be there. I am greater than death." Would our Lord have spoken thus if he had not been conscious of infinite power, conscious indeed of his Deity? How say some among you that he is not the Son of God? Assuredly he speaks the language of Omnipotence. These are not the words of a mere man. Hear them and practice them—"Be not afraid. Only believe."

37, 38. *And he suffered no man to follow him, save Peter and James, and John the brother of James. And he cometh to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and seeth the tumult, and them that wept and wailed greatly.*

That is to say, the hired mourners who came there to mimic sorrow. Everything false and hired must go out when Jesus enters to work his wonders.

39. *And when he was come in, he saith unto them Why make ye this ado, and weep? the damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.*

Jesus knew what he was about to do, and, speaking with the knowledge of the miracle he was about to perform, he said, "The damsel is not dead but sleepeth." A charlatan, who wanted to make himself famous, would have said, "The damsel is really dead," but the Saviour, in his infinite modesty of heart, puts it thus, "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth."

40. *And they laughed him to scorn.*

Can you picture the scene? These people, who had been hired to weep and wail, had not much of the spirit of mourning in them, for they laughed directly and derisively; they turned upon the mighty Master of life and death, and "laughed him to scorn."

40. *But when he had put them all out*

And here is another flash of Deity. Did you ever notice how the Lord Jesus frequently does things which are perfectly unaccountable if performed by a mere man, as when he went into the temple and cleared out the buyers and sellers with a scourge of small cords, and when in Gethsemane he only said, “I am he,” and they fell backward. Here, again, he put out of the room all the minstrels and hired mourners. Does it not show that occasionally a majesty flashed from the human person of Christ which overwhelmed everybody, and was perfectly irresistible. Yes, in his deepest humiliation our Lord had a glory about him which revealed the indwelling God.

He taketh the father and the mother of the damsel, and them that were with him, and entereth in where the damsel was lying.

Christ and death together in one room: a grand picture this! Look at the pale, dead child and the life-giving Lord. We know what the issue will be when our Lord enters the lists with the last enemy.

41. *And he took the damsel by the hand,*

That chill, motionless hand! See how the maiden lies before him like a dew-laden lily dank with the damps of death.

and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.

He spake to her in her own dear mother-tongue. How sweet to be recalled to life by sounds which were so familiar. There is something homely about all the calls of heavenly love.

42. *And straightway*

Notice how this word “straightway” comes in again. It is the characteristic word in reference to Christ’s miracles; they are usually wrought at once. We read, in the 29th verse, “Straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up.” Now we read, “Straightway”—

the damsel arose, and walked;

Oh, that the Lord Jesus Christ would work some “straightway” miracles in our midst just now! He can do it if he pleases; before this service ends, there may be some who shall have passed from death unto life, out of the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of grace. Blessed be God for this; who will it be?

For she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment.

How very often persons were “astonished” in Christ’s day! Sometimes it is put, “they marvelled;” at other times, “they were amazed,” or, “they wondered.” It would have been well if wonder had always turned to faith; but sometimes it corrupted into hate. God grant that our wonder at Christ may always be of that kind which crystallizes into love!

43. *And he charged them straitly that no man should know it;*

He did not wish to have this miracle published. There were reasons why, just then, there should not be much noise made by his miracles. Besides, our blessed Savior was ever gentle and modest, as it is written, “He shall not strive or cry, or cause his voice to be heard in the streets.” He sought not honor of men. Let us do nothing with the view of its being blazoned abroad.

and commanded that something should be given her to eat.

She might have continued to live by a miracle as she had been miraculously raised from the dead; but it was needless, and Christ never wrought an unnecessary miracle. Do not look for miracles when ordinary means will suffice. “He commanded that something should be given her to eat.” When life is given or restored, the next thing needed is nourishment; when you are made spiritually to live, be sure to attend a soul-feeding ministry; and diligently read the Word, that you may get all needful nourishment for your soul out of it.

Mark 6

1. *And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him.*

He stayed not to overdo what had been so well done. When he had completed his ministry in a place “he went out from thence.”

2. *And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?*

With what emotion did our Lord return to his native place! How ready he was to associate with former friends, for “he began to teach in the synagogue.” How eagerly they came together to hear their young countryman, who had made so great a stir! How amazed they were at the masterly way in which he touched great subjects, and wrought great deeds! Astonishment led to enquiry. They began to ask how it could be. The question, “From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him?” might have been brought forward reverently, and have led to their obtaining a most instructive reply; but some flavored their question with impertinent unbelief, and this cost them dear.

3. *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?*

His pedigree seemed to them to be of them lowliest. He had sprung from among

themselves: his reputed father was a village artisan; his mother was plain Mary, and his relations commonplace parties enough. This ought to have gratified and encouraged them; but it did not. They grew sarcastic, and harped upon the family names of James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas. They hinted that he could not have learned much wisdom in a carpenter's shop; and as he had not been among the rabbis to obtain a superior education, he could not really know much. How could he have attained to such eminence? He was a mere nobody. Why, they knew him when his parents lost him when they went up to the feast at Jerusalem! They could not listen to the talk of the carpenter's son.

And they were offended at him.

They stumbled at that which should have been a stepping-stone for them. Poor souls! How like to many in these days, who must have glitter and pretense, or they think nothing of the profoundest wisdom! If they can understand a sermon, they conceive that it cannot be a good one; if a man acts simply and naturally, he cannot in their eyes be worthy of much notice.

4. *But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.*

Still is it commonly the case that, where a man is known, his neighbors find it hard to think that he can be really great. Distance lends enchantment: a cloud increases the apparent size. This is folly.

5. *And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.*

Unbelief bound his hands. Why should he spend his sacred energy among a people who would not be profited thereby? Where he would have chosen to do most, he was forced to do least, because he saw that all he did would be wasted on them. The Lord save us from such a state of mind! Give us, O Lord, faith to the full; that for us, and in us, and by us, thou mayest be able to do many mighty works of grace!

6. *And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.*

There were but two occasions when our Lord Jesus is recorded to have marvelled at all, and both of these were concerning faith. First, he marvelled at the centurion: “I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel.” And on the second occasion, he marvelled at the absence of faith where it might have been expected to be found namely, in his own fellow townsmen: “He marvelled because of their unbelief.”

7-9. *And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.*

They would not need to pay for food or lodging: the people would entertain them freely, and therefore they required no form of money; not even a copper. They needed not to carry a wallet; for meals would be generously offered them by those whom they instructed and healed. They were not to load themselves with extra clothing; for if the weather should require it, the people would supply it: even if their shoes wore out, their hearers would see them shod. When a ministry is really acceptable, the preacher will not be left to suffer want as to the absolute necessaries of life. They needed not even wait to find a staff; for if one was required, and they set off without it, one would be given.

Among a willing people, such a mission is not only possible, but it is in the highest degree suitable. It is but right and just that people should support in temporals those who minister to them in spirituals, and it is right that plans should be adopted which cast this duty upon them, as in this case. The preacher is to preach freely; but those who are benefited are also freely to find meat for him. Such a mission as this is not a mission to the heathen in any sense. Its methods are good for itself, but they would not be possible among hostile tribes: in the case of work among opponents, our Lord’s command under other circumstances is to be followed.

10, 11. *And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them.*

Disclaim all fellowship with those who will not have fellowship with your Lord. Be not angry; do not denounce with bitterness; just "shake off the dust of your feet," and go elsewhere. Don't depart to rail at the people in private; but let them know that you quit them because they refuse your message. Do this openly, and in the most solemn and instructive manner, hoping that your departing act may be remembered. It is to be feared that we treat rejectors of Christ in a sadly biding manner, and do not hold up their rejection of our King to the detestation it deserves. We ought to let impenitent sinners know that we consider them out of our fellowship. If they will not hear, we must make them see that we disown them, and count them to be unclean, because they refuse Christ Jesus. How little of this is done by the smooth-tongued preachers of today! Men may refuse their gospel, and still be the bosom friends of those who preach to them. Yea, they try even from the pulpit to cheer them in their impenitence by the dream of a "larger hope."

Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.

The accursed cities of the plain may look for a fearful doom; but their portion will not be so unbearable as that of those to whom the gospel comes in freest fashion; and yet they will not receive its messengers, nor even hear their words. With what solemnity do these threatenings surround both the preaching and the hearing of the kingdom! Our Lord seals his terrible prophecy with a Verily and with that solemn introduction, "I say unto you."

Here our ever-blessed King sends forth his royal ambassadors under orders to summon the Jewish nation to own their sovereign Lord; and he supports them in their errand by a tremendous threat of doom to those who will not receive them, or listen to their words.

12, 13. *And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And*

they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

Having ministered to souls, they were to bless the bodies of men; and thus they would confirm their message by their miracles.

14. *And king Herod heard of him; (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.*

When the whole country was moved, “king Herod heard of him.” Then, but not till then, the fame of Jesus reached this wretched princelet, who was too absorbed in self and lust to hear much about spiritual matters. The peasant heard of Jesus before the prince. The Word of God may enter the palace, but it forces its way slowly. Herod spoke to his servants about this famous person, for he was so alarmed that he could not conceal his fears. A guilty conscience is haunted by a misdeed. “John” was written on the tyrant’s memory; and now that he is startled by a rumor of wonders being done, he cries out, “This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead.” Herod was a Sadducee by profession, but his terror made his skeptical creed crumble to dust. For John at least he believes that there is a resurrection. Great superstition often underlies a surface of avowed unbelief. Herod Antipas had a quarter of his father’s kingdom, and less than a quarter of his ability; but in selfish cruelty he was a true cub of the old wolf. He had enough conscience to scare him, though not enough to change him. Note how he believed in the power of a risen man: “Therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.” If from mere hearsay Herod attributed such power to our Lord on earth, shall we not believe in the Almighty power of our risen Lord upon his throne in glory?

15, 16. *Others said, That it is Elias. And others said, That it is a prophet, or as one of the prophets. But when Herod heard thereof, he said, It is John, whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead.*

These wore all conjectures, and far from the mark; yet was there some likeness to truth in them all. Herod’s notion that Jesus was John the Baptist, newly risen from the dead, seemed a probable one to many, since our Lord had like courage

and fidelity with John. Elijah, too, seemed to live again in our Lord's words of fire; Jeremiah was revived in his constant sorrow; and the prophets were repeated in his memorable teachings and marvelous life. Since many of these were types of him, it is small wonder that he should seem to be identical with them. Yet men make no discovery of the Lord's true character by their own guesswork: only those to whom he reveals himself will ever know him.

Error has many voices; truth alone is one, and abiding. Men say differing things concerning our Lord; but his Spirit alone bears effectual witness to the one true Christ of God.

17, 18. *For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.*

Of course it was not lawful for him to take to himself his brother Philip's wife while Philip was yet living, and while his own wife was living also. While he was the guest of Philip at home, he became ensnared by Herodias; and the guilty pair, who in addition to their being already wedded, were by birth too near of kin for lawful marriage, came back to Galilee as if they were man and wife. It was bravely spoken of the Baptist when he bluntly said, "It is not lawful for thee to have her"; but the sentence cost him dear. Herod Antipas could bear to do the deed, but he could not bear to be told that he had committed an unlawful act. John did not mince matters, or leave the question alone. What was a king to him if that king dared to trample on the law of God? He spoke out pointedly, and Herod knew that he did so. Herod laid, hold on John, because John's word had laid hold on Herod.

The power of evil love comes out in the words, "for Herodias' sake." This fierce woman would brook no rebuke of her licentiousness. She was a very Jezebel in her pride and cruelty; and Herod was as a puppet in her hands.

19, 20. *Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.*

Monarchs do not often care for religious discourses, except such as come from court preachers, who wear fine raiment, and use soft speech. John was not the kind of man for a king's palace—too rough, too blunt, too plain-speaking; his words thrust too much home: yet Herod heard him gladly.

The simple, plain preaching of John, his declaration of the Word with all honesty and simplicity, had power to pin Herod by the ear, to vibrate in his heart and to awaken his conscience, for sure we are it was awakened; if the awakening did not end in his conversion, at any rate it made him troubled in his sins so that he could not go on peaceably in iniquity.

21, 22. *And when a convenient day was come, that Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee; and when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him,*

There is no harm in keeping birthdays, but where is great harm in lewd dances, or in any other sports which suggest evil. Salome was a true "daughter of Herodias." She forgot her rank, and danced before the court after the lascivious fashion of the ago, so as to gratify a probably drunken monarch. She "pleased Herod," her mother's paramour; and we can readily guess the kind of dancing which would please him.

In these days mothers too often encourage their daughters in dress which is scarcely decent, and introduce them to dances which are not commendable for purity. No good can come of this; it may please the Herods, but it displeases God. In this case dancing led to a cruel crime; and it is to be feared that in many instances gross immoralities have taken their rise in dances which suggested uncleanness.

the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom.

A foolish promise, and a wicked oath. Men of Herod's order are always free with oaths. Men should know what they are at when they promise, and never set their

signature to a blank which another may fill up; for they may thus sign away their all. Besides, a mere piece of immodest posturing could never deserve so large a recompense. Herod was surely as much fool as knave. Had wine and lust taken away his heart?

24. *And she went forth, and said unto her mother, What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.*

The whole thing was planned between this shameless mother and daughter, who both knew Herod's weak points and how to handle him. The mother set her daughter dancing, and then put the request into her mouth: she was of her mother's nature, and readily carried out that wicked woman's instructions. No doubt Herodias was more incensed than Herod at what the Baptist had dared to say; for it is usually the case that the female offender is most angered by a rebuke of such sin. Sad that from noble Maccabean blood such a female monster should have sprung!

25, 26. *And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.*

Pretty sorrow! A crocodile is said to shed tears over those it snaps in two. "The King" was afraid of the consequences. Poor king! He may have felt a dying struggle of conscience, for Herod had some sort of reverence for John; yet his grief could not have been very deep, for he had already willed to kill him. The king feared that his courtiers and comrades at the drinking bout would think him weak, and perhaps jeer at him for being too religious to touch a prophet. Such fear of being thought weak proved that he was weak indeed. In addition to this, Herodias would consider him to be by no means so fond of her as he had professed to be, and how could he endure her passionate grief? Moreover, he was "a man of honor", and for the oath's sake he must not run back.

With the regret which a wolf feels because he must eat the lamb, he gave orders for the murder of John, and the handing of his head to the young girl. Rash

promises, and even oaths, are no excuse for doing wrong. The promise was in itself null and void, because no man has a right to promise to do wrong. Wicked oaths ought to be repented of, and not acted out; but this cruel tyrant commanded the murder, and so went through with his horrible promise.

27. *And immediately the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison,*

Herod sent, and beheaded John. By word a precious life is ended. How lightly tyrants think of murder! No miracle was wrought for John's deliverance. Why should there be? It was well for the Baptist to go to his reward, for his work was done. He was not left to pine in solitude: the man of God left his prison for Paradise by one sudden stroke of the sword. It was a foul murder, but to the Baptist it was a happy release. He was no longer in the power of Herod or Herodias: he received his crown in heaven though he had lost his head on earth.

28. *And brought his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel: and the damsel gave it to her mother.*

What a present for a young lady! It was given to the damsel. The girl is not ashamed to lift the dainty dish, and bear it to her fiendish mother, that she may glut her malice by the sight of the head of her faithful reprover. What a mother and daughter! Two bad women can do a world of mischief. What a fate for such a head! Did it even from the charger charge the foul adulteress with her crime?

29. *And when his disciples heard of it, they came and took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb.*

The good man's followers did not desert their murdered leader. The mangled corpse was surrendered to them; they reverently took up the body, and buried it. They were his disciples still, and his death was not the death of their faith. They did the only act of kindness then in their power to him whom they had followed. They regarded the headless trunk as being the last relic of John, and so they gathered about it, and gave it honorable burial. But it is not said by the Evangelist that they buried John, but "they took up his corpse, and laid it in a tomb," not him. The real John no man could bury, and Herod soon found that,

being dead, he yet spake.

30-32. *And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught. And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately.*

Our Lord could not allow so sad an event as the death of his Forerunner to pass without special devotion; perhaps also he judged it wise to be out of the dominions of Herod just at this time. When such a tiger once tastes blood he is apt to thirst for more. Moreover, rest was needed both by himself and by the little band which attended him; and our Lord was no hard taskmaster, overdriving his servants. As soon therefore as Jesus heard of John's death, he went with his followers to a lone spot beyond Herod's jurisdiction; "a desert place." He went there by ship, to put the sea between him and the crowd. It was difficult for him to get into retirement, but he used common-sense ways of obtaining it. He knew the absolute need of privacy, and he strove after it. The discreet use of solitude has yet to be learned by many workers.

33. *And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him.*

The multitude would not permit him to be at rest: they were curious, anxious, necessitous; and so they were soon on foot after him. While he sailed by sea, they hurried along the shore. It is a happy sign when there is an eagerness to hear the Word of God. The Lord send us more of it in these days of religious indifference.

34. *And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.*

When he left the boat and went forth, our Lord found a congregation waiting for him. In the most emphatic sense he saw the people, and at the sight he was burdened. He was not angry at the great multitude, nor did he show disappointment at being balked in his pursuit of quiet; but he was moved with compassion. The original word is very expressive: his whole being was stirred to its lowest depth, and therefore he proceeded at once to work miracles of mercy among them. They came unasked, he received them tenderly, he blessed them graciously, and at length fed them bountifully. He was as a stag that fled from the huntsmen; but they had overtaken him, and he yielded himself to them.

35, 36. *And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed: Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread: for they have nothing to eat.*

The disciples had the compassion of men who see the need; but to their human thought there seemed but one poor way out of it, namely, in effect to shirk the difficulty by sending the multitudes away. The short way out of a perplexity is generally a very poor affair. To this day many Christians get no further than leaving the masses to themselves, or to some unknown influences which may turn up. One thing was wise in the disciples; they did bring the matter to Jesus: "When it was evening, his disciples came to him." They represented the place as barren, the time as late, the people as many, their needs as great: they were well posted up in all discouraging matters. The proposed course of action was the one weak point in the representation. Our schemes are for the most part wretched affairs. It is almost a wonder that we dare to state them. Do we forget that our Lord Jesus hears our sorry proposals?

Note the disciples' word: "The time is now passed." We usually think the times are unpropitious for large attempts. As for the position, it is hopeless: "This is a desert place." What can be done here? As for the disciples' proposal, it was of a kind which is common enough: "Don't let the people die under our noses; pull down the rookery in the next street; clear out the bad houses from our district." "Send the multitude away." Or, better still, show the people the dignity of self-help! Talk to them about thrift and emigration. Urge them to go into the villages, and buy themselves bread. This is a favorite nostrum at this day with those who

want to save their own loaves and fishes. Our Lord has nobler thoughts than theirs: he will display his royal bounty among the hunger, crowd.

37. *He answered and said unto them, Give ye them to eat.*

"Give ye them to eat": you talk of their buying for themselves, but they are penniless, and cannot buy. Everything must be free, or they will starve; you are the men to feed them freely; get at it. Begin at once.

And they say unto him, Shall we go and buy two hundred pennyworth of bread, and give them to eat?

That is our way. When our faith is little, we begin calculating the pennyworths that are wanted, and we make them out to be so much more than we possess or can possibly scrape together. That is not faith, it is reason—poor, dim, shallow reason, which forgets the Infinite, and begins to calculate its own limited and insufficient forges.

38. *He saith unto them, How many loaves have ye? go and see. And when they knew, they say, Five, and two fishes.*

See how they overhaul their provisions; and they report, "We have here but five loaves." Those two sardines make the stock seem positively ridiculous. It is a good thing for us to know how very poor we are, and how far from being able to meet the wants of the people around us. It is for our good to be made to confess this in so many words to our Lord.

Truly, he who writes this comment has often felt as if he had neither loaf nor fish; and yet for some forty years and more he has been a full-handed waiter at the King's great banquets.

39. *And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass.*

He had prepared both carpet and seats for his guests, by making grass to grow in

his open-air banquet hall. At the bidding of their great Host, all the crowds sat down. “He commanded,” and they obeyed: a proof of the singular power of the personality of our Lord to produce obedience even in simple matters. One would have thought that they might have answered — “What is the use of sitting down? How shall a table be furnished in this wilderness?” But our Lord’s presence awed unbelief into silence and obedience. The King of men is immediately obeyed when he commands in the fullness of his majesty. “Where the word of a king is, there is power.”

40. *And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.*

What a Commander-in-Chief Christ is. When he makes a banquet it is not a scramble, it is always orderly, and when there is anything very disorderly it is generally because Christ is not there, if he is there, everything seems to fit into its place.

41. *And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them; and the two fishes divided he among them all.*

Now that all is in order, the divine Lord takes the slender provision into his blessed hands. By a simple sign he teaches the people whence to expect gracious supplies: “He looked up to heaven.” Not without a blessing does the al fresco meal begin: “He blessed.” God’s blessing must be sought even when Jesus is there: He will not act without the Father. Our Lord Jesus did all in the provision of the feast: he blessed, he brake, he gave to his disciples. All is with him.

The disciples come in to take their subordinate position, after he has displayed his divine creatorship. They are the waiters: they serve and distribute; they can do no more; they are glad to do that. In haste, but yet in order, they divide the food among the throng, much wondering and adoring as they so do. It was bread and a relish with it; good fare and agreeable; sufficient, but not luxurious. Some would give the poor only the barest necessaries; bread only; our Lord adds fish. What a feast was this! Christ for Master of the feast: apostles for butlers; thousands for numbers; and miracles for supplies! What a far more glorious feast is that which the gospel spreads for hungry souls! What a privilege to be fed by

the Son of God!

42. *And they did all eat, and were filled.*

No one was neglected, no one refused, no one was too faint, no one left off till he was satisfied, no one needed anything else, no one found that the food did not suit him; for indeed they were all hungry, “and they did all eat.” No one stinted himself, or was stinted, all “were filled.” Ours is a filling Benefactor, and he provides filling food.

43. *And they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments, and of the fishes.*

After the feast, twelve great baskets wore needed to hold the fragments. It was impossible to exhaust the store. The baskets were full as well as the people. There was more provision after the feeding than before it. By feeding others our stock increases. That which was left had been blessed as well as that which was eaten, and therefore it was fine food for the disciples. They gave plain bread and fish, and they receive more in quantity, and a blessing to improve the quality. Those who wait upon others at Christ’s bidding shall have a fair portion for themselves. Those who fill others’ mouths shall have their own baskets filled. Everybody is satisfied when Jesus makes the feast.

44. *And they that did eat of the loaves were about five thousand men.*

Five thousand men is no small dinner-party. Think of five thousand fed with five loaves! A loaf among a thousand! Never let us fear that our consecrated stores will not hold out, or that we have not talent or ability enough if the Lord is pleased to use us. Our King will yet feed all the nations on that gospel which is today so little thought of. Amen! So let it be.

45. *And straightway he constrained his disciples to get into the ship, and to go to the other side before unto Bethsaida, while he sent away the people.*

Straightway is a business word: Jesus loses no time. No sooner is the banquet over than he sends off the guests to their homes. While they are well fed he bids them make the best of their way home. He who made the multitude sit down was able also to send away the people; but they needed sending, for they were loth to go.

The sea must be crossed again, or Jesus cannot find seclusion. How he must run the gauntlet to get a little rest! Before he starts again across the sea, he performs another act of self-denial; for he cannot leave till he sees the crowd happily dispersed. He attends to that business himself, giving the disciples the opportunity to depart in peace. As the captain is the last to leave the ship, so is the Lord the last to leave the scene of labor. The disciples would have chosen to stay in his company, and to enjoy the thanks of the people; but he constrained them to get into a ship. He could not get anyone to go away from him at this time without sending and constraining This loadstone has great attractions.

He evidently promised his disciples that he would follow them; for the words are, “to go to the other side before.” How he was to follow he did not say, but he could always find a way of keeping his appointments. How considerate of him to wait amid the throng while the disciples sailed away in peace. He always takes the heavy end of the load himself.

46. *And when he had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray.*

Now that the crowd is gone, he can take his rest, and he finds it in prayer. He went up into a mountain apart in a place where he might speak aloud, and not be overheard or disturbed, he communed with the Father alone. This was his refreshment and his delight. He continued therein till the thickest shades of night had gathered, and the day was gone. Alone, yet not alone, he drank in new strength as he communed with his Father. He must have revealed this private matter to the recording evangelist, and surely it was with the intent that we should learn from his example.

We cannot afford to be always in company, since even our blessed Lord felt that he must be alone.

47, 48. *And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea,*

and he alone on the land. And he saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them:

While Jesus was alone, they, in the ship, were in the same condition, but not occupied with the same spiritual exercise. When they first quitted the shore it was fair sailing in the cool of the evening; but a storm gathered hastily as night covered the sky. On the lake of Galilee the wind rushes down from the gullies between the mountains, and causes grievous peril to little boats; sometimes fairly lifting them out of the water, and anon submerging them beneath the waves. That deep lake was peculiarly dangerous for small craft. They were far from land, for they were "in the midst of the sea", equally distant from either shore. "The wind was contrary", and would not let them go to any place which they sought. It was a whirlwind, and they were whirled about by it, but could not use it for reaching either shore.

How much did their case resemble ours when we are in sore distress! We are tossed about, and can do nothing; the blast is too furious for us to bear up against it, or even to live while driven before it.

One happy fact remains: Jesus is pleading on the shore though we are struggling on the sea. It is also comfortable to know that we are where he constrained us to go, and he has promised to come to us in due time, and therefore all must be safe, though the tempest rages terribly.

and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them.

Jesus is sure to come. The night wears on and the darkness thickens; the fourth watch of the night draws near, but where is he? Faith says, "He must come." Though he should stay away till almost break of day, he must come. Unbelief asks, "How can he come?" Ah, he will answer for himself: he can make his own way. He comes in the teeth of the wind, and on the face of the wave. Never fear that he will fail to reach the storm-tossed barque: his love will find out the way. Whether it be to a single disciple, or to the church as a whole, Jesus will appear in his own chosen hour, and his time is sure to be the most timely.

49, 50. *But when they saw him walking upon the sea, they supposed it*

had been a spirit, and cried out: for they all saw him, and were troubled.

Yes, the disciples saw him; saw Jesus their Lord, and derived no comfort from the sight. Poor human nature's sight is a blind thing compared with the vision of a spiritual faith. They saw, but knew not what they saw. What could it be but a phantom? How could a real man walk on those foaming billows? How could he stand in the teeth of such a hurricane? They were already at their wits' end, and the apparition put an end to their courage. We seem to hear their shriek of alarm: they "cried out."

We read not that they "were troubled before": they were old sailors, and had no dread of natural forces; but a spirit — ah, that was too much of a terror. They were at their worst now; and yet, if they had known it, they were on the verge of their best. It is noteworthy that the nearer Jesus was the greater was their fear. Want of discernment blinds the soul to its richest consolations. Lord, be near, and let me know thee! Let me not have to say with Jacob, "Surely God was in this place; and I knew it not!"

And immediately he talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

He did not keep them in suspense: "Immediately he talked with them." How sweetly sounded that loving and majestic voice! Above the roar of waves and howling of winds, they heard the voice of the Lord. This was his old word also, "Be of good cheer." The most conclusive reason for courage was his own presence. "It is I; be not afraid." If Jesus be near, if the spirit of the storm be, after all, the Lord of love, all room for fear is gone. Can Jesus come to us through the storm? Then we shall weather it, and come to him. He who rules the tempest is not the devil, not chance, not a malicious enemy; but Jesus. This should end all fear.

51. *And he went up unto them into the ship; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves beyond measure, and wondered.*

It is well to be safe in a storm, but more pleasant to find the calm return and the

hurricane end.

52. *For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened.*

Hard hearts and painful unbeliefs spring up in the waste places where we bury our forgotten mercies. The miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ ought to be considered; they are not trifles, and they ought not to be passed over as if they were the mere common-places of a daily newspaper.

If the disciples had considered the miracle of the loaves they would have observed that Christ is grand at emergencies. When there were five thousand people to be fed and no towns and villages near enough to supply them with bread, so that the people must faint by the way ere they could reach the markets, then Christ was ready, full-handed in time of scarcity, prompt to dispense his liberality, able to meet the emergency so perfectly, that the people must have been very thankful that such an emergency had arisen, and no doubt often wished that they could have been in such a strait again if they could have had the Lord near to bring them out of it.

53-55. *And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore. And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew him, and ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick, where they heard he was.*

The barque so lately tempest tossed is soon at the desired haven; and now other scenes of wonder meet our eyes. Land where he may, the great Physician is sure to find patients. Some of the men of that place had knowledge of him; and these were as sparks to set the rest of the people on fire by wonderful accounts of what Jesus had done. Many became eager advertisers of his skill, and either went themselves, or “sent out” others “into all that country round about.”

56. *And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched*

him were made whole.

Very busy those people were. They sent out; they brought unto him; they besought him; they touched his garment; they were made perfectly whole. The sentences follow each other without a break. The people asked little, they begged “that they might only touch the hem of his garment;” but they received much; for they “were made perfectly whole.” In no case was there any failure: in every instance the work was complete. Their humble request was founded upon a precedent, was urged by earnest spirits, and was accompanied with practical sympathy, therefore it was not refused. How glad that whole region was made! “All that were diseased” had become happy witnesses of the Lord’s healing power.

Our King is master both on land and water. Whether it is on the sea of Gennesaret, or in “the land of Gennesaret” his supreme power and majesty are infallibly proven. He stills tempests, and allays fevers. He touches waves with his foot, and they grow firm; he touches sick bodies with his hand, and they return to health. He imparts to his servant Peter, and to the hem of his own garment. marvelous power.

Mark 7

1-5. *Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?*

When our Lord was busiest his enemies assailed him. These ecclesiastics “of Jerusalem” were probably the cream of the set, and from their great reputation they reckoned upon an easy victory over the rustic preacher. Perhaps they were a deputation from headquarters, sent to confound the new Teacher. They had a question to raise, which to them may have seemed important; or possibly they pretended to think it so to answer their own purposes. Traditions of the elders were great things with them: to transgress these must be a crime indeed. Washing of the hands is a thing proper enough; one could wish it were oftener practiced; but to exalt it into a religious rite is a folly and a sin. These “scribes and Pharisee” washed their hands, whether they needed washing or not, out of a supposed zeal to be rid of any particle that might render them ceremonially unclean.

Our Lord’s disciples had so far entered into Christian liberty that they did not observe the rabbinical tradition: “they wash not their hands when they eat bread.” Why should they wash if their hands were clean? Tradition had no power

over their consciences. No man has any more right to institute a new duty than to neglect an old one. The issuing of commands is for the King alone. Yet these religionists enquire why the Lord's disciples break a law which was no law. It will be well if our opponents are unable to bring against us any worse charge than this

6. *He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*

Right well did they deserve the name which the indignant Savior fixed upon them: "You hypocrites." They were agitated about hands unwashed, and yet laid their foul hands upon God's most holy law. The prophetic words of Isaiah were indeed descriptive of them: he had pictured them to the life. Theirs was mouth-religion, lip-homage, and that only. Their heart never approached the Lord at all.

Thus, our Lord gave his opponents Scripture instead of tradition: he broke their wooden weapons with the sword of the Spirit. Holy Scripture must be our weapon against the Church of traditions: nothing will overthrow Rome but the Word of the Lord.

When quoting from the prophecy of Isaiah, our blessed Lord not only used a translation, but he gave the sense freely; thus rebuking the mere word-chopping of the Rabbis. They could count the letters of a sacred book, and yet utterly miss its meaning: he gave the soul and spirit of the inspired utterance. Jesus insisted upon heart-worship, and said nothing as to the matter of washing or not washing the hands before eating bread. That was too paltry a point for him to dwell upon.

7-9. *Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.*

Religion based on human authority is worthless; we must worship the true God in the way of his own appointing, or we do not worship him at all. Doctrines and

ordinances are only to be accepted when the divine Word supports them, and they are to be accepted for that reason only. The most punctilious form of devotion is vain worship, if it is regulated by man's ordinance apart from the Lord's own command.

What is a "tradition" when compared with a "commandment"? What is a tradition when it is in conflict with a commandment? What are elders in comparison with God? Our Lord knew best how to handle these messengers of the evil powers. His question carried the war into their own territory, and turned their boastful assault into utter rout.

10-13. *For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death: But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. And ye suffer him no more to do ought for his father or his mother; making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye.*

Our Lord lays home his accusation. God had bound the son and daughter to honor the parent; and this unquestionably included rendering to father and mother such help as they might need. From this duty there could be no escape without breaking the plain command of God. It was always right, by the law of nature, to be grateful to parents; and by the law of Moses it was always a deadly sin to revile them. In Exodus 21:17 we read: "He that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death." Father and mother are to be had in reverence, and cherished with love; and the precept which ordains this, is called "the first commandment with promise." There could be no mistake as to the meaning of the divine law, yet the base teachers of the period had invented a method of excusing men from the performance of so obvious a duty.

These wretched tradition-lovers taught that if a man cried, "Corban! A gift"; and thus nominally set apart for God what his parents sought of him, he must not afterwards give it to them. If in anger, or even in pretense, he placed what was requested by father or mother under a ban he became free from the obligation to aid his parents. It is true he was not required by the Rabbis to carry out his vow, and actually give the money or the goods to God; but as he had compromised the

sacred name, he must on no account hand over the gift to his parents. So that a hasty word would loose any child from his duty to aid his father or his mother; and then he might pretend that he I was very sorry for having said it, but that his conscience would not permit him to break the ban. Vile hypocrites! Advocates of the devil! Was ever device more shallow? Yet thus they "made the word of God of one effect."

14. *And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand:*

He turns to the common throng, among whom he had wrought his miracles of love. He called the multitude and bade them "hearken, and understand." It looks as if he would say by his actions that he would rather teach the ignorant peasants than those false-hearted scribes and Pharisees. He had more hope of being understood by the ignorant multitude than by educated men who had so wretchedly enslaved their judgments by following worthless traditions. The appeal of the gospel is from the doctors to the people. These last have more common sense and honesty than the former; yet even these need the exhortation, "Hear, and understand."

15. *There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.*

Here is something for the crowd to think over, and for the Pharisees to chew upon. It would be a riddle to many, and a surprise to all. Preeminently it would be a staggering statement for formalists. Religionists of the day placed the chief point of morals in meats and drinks, but the Lord Jesus declared that it lay in thoughts and acts. The Pharisees had now a string to harp upon, since harp they would: this saying would afford a text for malicious comment for many a day. They had sought to lay hold upon a sentence which they could use as an accusation, and in this case he gave them one which they might quote with that design if they dared to do so. It was diametrically opposed to their teaching, and yet it was not easy to meet its keen edge, or withstand its singular force.

16. *If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*

This matter is worthy of earnest heed. If you can hear anything, hear this truth. This call to attention needs to be oft repeated. Through the hearing ear, the divine blessing comes to the soul; therefore hear, and your soul shall live. Our Lord and King, who made the ear, has a right to demand its attention to his voice. Some men have no ears to hear truth, but quick ears for falsehood. We should be grateful if the Lord has given us spiritual perception; for "the hearing ear and the seeing eye" are from the Lord.

17. *And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.*

The saying, which his disciples call a parable, was spoken to the multitude, and then were bidden to understand it; but assuredly they did not comprehend it, for even the College of Apostles failed to grapple with it. They did well to go at once to the fountain-head and humbly say, "Declare unto us this parable." He that uttered the dark saying could best interpret it.

18, 19. *And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also?*

Of course the Pharisees would hate the light, and so refuse to see the spiritual truth which our Lord had set before them in so forcible a fashion. Nor was it wonderful that the crowd should be too ignorant to see the divine meaning of the compact sentence. But should not the chosen twelve have had clearer insight? After all their Lord's teaching, were they "yet without understanding" Should they not have reached the inner sense of their Lord's utterance? Alas, how often have we been in a like state! How pertinently might the question be put to us, "Are ye also yet without understanding?"

Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?

After years of the Master's teaching, are we still unable to grasp an elementary truth? Can we not discern between physical and spiritual defilement? Food does not touch the soul: it passes through the body, but it does not enter the affections, or the understanding, And therefore does not defile a man. That which is eaten is

material substance, and does not come into contact with the moral sense. This is clear enough to any unprejudiced mind. Meat passes through every passage of the bodily frame, from its entrance at the mouth, its passage through the bowels, to its ultimate expulsion; but it bears no relation to the mental and spiritual part of our being; and it is there only that real defilement can be caused.

20. *And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.*

The outcomings of the mind have sprung from the soul of the man, and have a moral character about them: “things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart.” Words, and the thoughts which wear words as their garments, and the acts which are the embodiment of words; these are of the man himself, and these defile him. If the mind or heart had nothing to do with an act, it would no more pollute a man than the food which he swallows and ejects. Because acts and words come not from the mouth only, but from the soul, they are of far more importance than meats and drinks. Of course, defilement comes to a man when he is guilty of gluttony and drunkenness; yet this is not because of the mere meat or drink, but because the taking of them to excess is the exercise of unbridled appetite, and this also grows by that which gratifies it.

21, 22. *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:*

What a list! What must that heart be out of which so many evils pour forth! These are the bees: what must the hive be! “Evil thoughts”, or reasonings, such as these Pharisees had been guilty of. “Modern thought” is a specimen of these evils; it comes from the heart rather than from the head. “Adulteries and fornications” are first gloated over in the heart before they are enacted by the body. The heart is the cage from whence these unclean birds fly forth. “Murders” begin not with the dagger, but with the malice of the soul. “Thefts” also are born in the heart: a man would not wrongfully take with the hand if he had not wrongfully desired with the heart. “Deceit”, too, first ferments in the heart, and then its venom is spit out in the conversation. He that utters “blasphemy” against his Maker shows a very black heart: how could he fall into such a needless, useless vice, unless his inmost soul had been steeped in rebellion against the

Lord? These dreadful evils all flow from one fountain, from the very nature and life of fallen man.

23. *All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.*

They not only come from a defiled nature, but they still further defile the man. Thus had the Savior proved his aphorism. The things from within evidently, are of a most defiling character, and make a man unfit for communion with God, and for the performance of holy duties; but the neglect of having water poured on the hands cannot be in the least comparable thereto. Yet those who had no repentance of polluting sins were struck with horror at a man's eating a piece of bread with unwashen hands.

24 *And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid.*

He left the loathsome company o the Pharisees, and went thence, going as far away as he could without quitting his own country. The great Bishop went to the very borders of his diocese. An inward attraction drew him where he knew that a believing heart was yearning for him. He was sent to the house of Israel as a preacher; but he interpreted his commission in it largest sense, and went "into the borders of Tyre and Sidon." When those at the center prove incorrigible, the Lord goes to those who can be only reached from the circumference. Let us always plough to the very end of the field, and serve our day and generation to the extreme limits of our sphere.

25-27. *For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet: the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.*

Just as Jesus went to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, a woman came out of the same coasts to meet him. Sooner or later, a meeting will come about between Christ and seeking souls. This woman had no claim on account of her

nationality: she was a Gentile of the worst sort, of a race long before condemned to die. She came from the narrow strip of land whereon the Tyrians dwelt; and like Hiram, of Tyre, she knew the name of David; but she went further, for she had faith in David's Son. Love to her daughter led her to travel, to cry, to beseech, to implore mercy.

What will not a mother's love achieve? Her need had abolished the barrier between Gentile and Jew; she appealed to Jesus as though she I were of the same country as his disciples. She asked the healing of her child as a mercy to herself. She asked it of Jesus as Lord. She asked it of One greater than Solomon, the son of David, the wisest and most potent of wonderworkers. She put the case briefly and pathetically, and pleaded for her daughter with all a mother's loving anxiety.

Her need taught her how to pray. Until we, also, know what we require, and are full of hopeful longings, we shall never plead prevailingly. Do we pray for our children as this woman pleaded for her daughter? Have we not good reason to take her for our example?

27. *But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.*

At length he turns, and gives a reply to her pleading; but it is not a cheering one. How hard its language! How unlike our Lord's usual self! And yet how true! How unanswerable! Truly "it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Of course privileges must not be given to those who have no right to them, nor must reserved boons be wasted upon the unworthy. The blessing sought is as bread for children, and the Canaanites were no more members of the chosen family than so many dogs. Their heathen character made them like dogs as to uncleanness. For generations they had known no more of the true God than the dogs which roam the streets. Often they and other Philistine tribes had snapped as dogs at the heels of the Lord's people. The woman had probably heard such phrases as this from proud Jewish bigots, but she had not expected it from the Lord.

28. *And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs.*

It was humbly spoken: “Yes, Lord.” It was bravely spoken; for she found food for faith in the hard crusts of our Lord’s language. Our Lord had used a word which should be rendered “little dogs”, and she caught at it. Little dogs become the playmates of the children; they lie under the table, and pick up the fragments which fall to the ground from the table of their little masters. The householder so far takes the little dog under his care as to allow him to be under the table. If, Gentile dog as she is, she may not be shepherded as one of the flock, she will be content to be tolerated as one of the household in the character of a little dog; for then she will be allowed the crumbs which fall from the children’s bread, from the dog’s little masters’ table. Great as was the blessing which she sought, it was but a crumb to the Lord’s bounty, and to Israel’s portion, and therefore she begged to have it, dog as she owned herself to be. Let us accept the worst character that the Scripture gives us, and still find in it an argument for hope.

29, 30. *And he said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.*

Our Savior loves great faith, and grants to it whatever it desires. Her faith was great comparatively: for a heathen woman, and for one who knew so little of the Savior, she was surpassingly strong in faith. But her faith was not only great comparatively it was great positively: to believe in a silent Christ, in one who treats her with a rebuff, in one who calls her a dog, is exceedingly great faith, measure it how you will.

According to her will her daughter’s cure was immediate, perfect, and enduring. Oh, for like precious faith, especially for such faith in reference to our sons and daughters! Why should we not have it? Jesus is the same, and we have even more reasons for trusting in him than the Canaanitess could have had. Lord we believe; help thou our unbelief, and make our children whole.

31-36. *And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis. And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into*

his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue; And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. And he charged them that they should tell no man:

As yet they were to be silent as to our Lord's highest claims, for fear the people should in rash zeal set him up as king by force of arms. It was dangerous to tell such an ill-instructed multitude what they would be sure to misunderstand and misuse. The command to tell no man must have sounded very strangely in the disciples' ears. It was no business of theirs to discover the reason of their Lord's orders; it was enough for them to do as he bade them. We are under no such embargo, and therefore we will tell to all that our Lord is the Savior, the Anointed of God, or, as he has himself worded it, "Jesus the Christ."

but the more he charged them, so much the more a great deal they published it;

We may not hope that we are doing right if we disobey our Lord. However natural disobedience may appear to be, it is disobedience, and must not be excused. Even if the results turned out to be advantageous, it would not make it right to break the command of our Lord. Silence is more than golden when our King commands it. He doth not seek applause, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets that he may be known to be doing a great work. His followers do well to copy his example.

37. *And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.*

Is not the whole of Christ's life such a picture that God himself looked at every line and tint of it with infinite admiration? Have you not yourself traversed the gallery of the Savior's life, and pausing at each picture and scene, been filled with amazement and led to exclaim, "He hath done all things well." When your mind has been most devout and most holy, have you not more than ever admired every little trait in your Savior's character, every separate feature of every action of his life, whether public or private.

Mark 8

1. *In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them,*

History repeats itself. We shall be wise to note the variations. What Jesus has done once he can and will do again and again, should need arise. In fact, one mercy is the promise of another. Our Lord is here the first to speak upon the way of dealing with the vast famishing crowd: the disciples do not come to him about the business, but he begins the conversation. In every case his heart is first, and in this case his speech is so. “Then Jesus called his disciples unto him.” They, are to be co-workers, and so he consults them, making them members of his privy-council.

2. *I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat;*

He has all tenderness, and can truly say, “I have compassion on the multitude.” Whether he moves in a matter of distress or not, his heart is always compassionate, and he thinks of the people’s present fasting, and possible fainting. His compassion is the spring which sets his power in motion. The crowds had continued following him, and he could not but pity the need which arose out of their perseverance in listening to his teaching. These people had endured a three days’ fast, or at least scantiness of food, to hear him preach. What preaching it must have been! But the great Teacher cares for their bodies as well as for their souls. and will not feel content to feed their minds only.

3. *And if I send them away fasting to their own houses, they will faint by the way: for divers of them came from far.*

From the usual point of view their lack of provision was their own concern: they had gathered of their own accord, and they could not reasonably look to him to give them both board and instruction for nothing; but his great heart could not consent to let them faint: he would not even innocently be the cause of injury to one of them. He solemnly declares, “I will not send them away fasting.” He would not have his servants indifferent to the sufferings of the poor, even as to the bread which perisheth. We may be doubly sure that he will not long allow any earnest hearer to faint through spiritual hunger. He may make us wait to awaken appetite; but he will not in the end dismiss us unfed. He loves not to let the hungry famish; he fears “lest they faint in the way.” If any of us are coming near to that state, he perceives it, and will interpose. Let us cultivate an appetite for heavenly food, and Jesus will supply its cravings.

4. *And his disciples answered him, From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness.*

Why did they not ask their Master what he could do in such an emergency as that? After so much experience of his power as they had already had, it is wonderful that they did not refer the matter to him, and say, “Lord, thou canst feed the multitude; we beseech thee do it.” But they did not act so wisely; instead, they began questioning about ways and means. “From whence can a man satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?”

5. *And he asked them, How many loaves have ye? And they said, Seven.*

The Lord accepts their association, and says, “How many loaves have ye?” Small as their store was, and utterly insignificant for the work proposed, he allows them to contribute it towards his grand design. They make a rapid inventory, and they speak of it in mournful tones: “Seven.” Much like our own poor stock-in-trade for holy service. The loaves were by no means such masses of food as we intend by the English word; they were merely thin cakes. Yet we must put all that we have into the common stock, and it will be enough in the hands of him who worketh all things.

6, 7. *And he commanded the people to sit down on the ground:*

The people are prepared for the festival by willingness to obey. What they had seen of our Lord's miraculous power awakened expectation, and created readiness to follow his lead. There is generally a preparedness of mind when Jesus is about to work his wonders of grace. Lord, cause our people to be ready "to sit down on the ground" at thy feast of grace!

and he took the seven loaves, and gave thanks, and brake, and gave to his disciples to act before them; and they did set them before the people. And they had a few small fishes: and he blessed, and commanded to set them also before them.

He did as aforetime. His way is perfect, and so there was no need for altering it. They only made one handful for him. This shows us that our slender abilities must be placed at his disposal, and in his wonderworking hands. He does not disdain to carry the bread and the fish, though he bears up both heaven and earth. His giving thanks at an outdoor meal should teach us not to eat without thanksgiving. The breaking teaches that there must be expenditure of talent, and that there should be a crumbing down of truth to suit human mouths. His giving the provision into many hands shows that nothing is to be retained in store, but all must be distributed among the many. Our Lord Jesus again honored his disciples by making them the servitors by whom he reached the multitude. Lord, use us: for if we have neither loaf nor fish, we have grilling hands.

8. *So they did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the broken meat that was left seven baskets.*

The feast was carried out in a manner so orderly, and with provision so bountiful, that all ate to satisfaction: even little children had their bread and fish. The remainder, the broken food, was too good to waste, and so it was taken up in baskets for future use. The God of abundance is yet the God of frugality. We. want not, but also we waste not. Baskets are always to be had: the difficulty is to fill them. Here the baskets corresponded to the number of the loaves; in the former banquet they corresponded to the number of the apostles. The blessing which rewards service may bear a relation to the workers or to the original supply which they contributed, according to the manner of comparison. In both cases of feeding the multitude, that which was in store after use was greater than

that which was at first possessed. The more we give the more we have. May not some of us be poor because we have given so little away? Might not the most gifted have had more gifts by this time if they had unselfishly laid out what hat they have for the good of others?

9. *And they that had eaten were about four thousand:*

Christ is the great Master of the art of multiplication. However small is the stock with which we begin, we have only to dedicate it all to him, and he will multiply and increase it until it will go far beyond our utmost expectations, and there will be more left after the feast is over than there was before it began. Bring your small talents, bring the little grace you have, to Christ, for he can so increase your store that you will never know any lack, but shall have all the greater abundance the greater the demand that is made upon that store. Had these four thousand people not been miraculously fed by Christ, the seven loaves and the few small fishes would have remained just as they were; but now that the four thousand have to be fed, the loaves and fishes are multiplied by Christ in a very extraordinary manner, so that, in the end, there is far more provision than they had at the beginning. Expect, beloved, to be enriched by your losses, to grow by that which looks as if it would crush you, and to become greater by that which threatens to annihilate you. Only put yourself into Christ's hands, and he will make good use of you, and leave you better than you were before he used you as the means of helping and blessing others.

and he sent them away.

Our Lord was ever earnest to send the crowds home: he desired not to detain them from their daily labor. He does not want them to attend him as a guard of honor, or as enthusiastic processionists: he speeds away from their praises.

10. *And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha.*

He took ship. Like a shuttle through the loom, he crosses and recrosses the lake. Our Lord was largely a seafaring man. Let sailors run up Christ's colors, and sail under his command. O Lord Jesus, I would traverse the sea of life with thee as

my pilot, owner, and captain!

11. *And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.*

The King is again met by his foes. On this occasion they come not with a question, but with the old demand for a sign. This time it must be “a sign from heaven”, possibly a marvel in the sky. What right had they to set him a test of such a sort as their fancy might suggest? What need for more signs when his miracles were so many? Were not all his miracles signs from heaven? Did not this demand cast a slur on all that he had already done? Was it not a practical ignoring of all his previous works of power? Too often we also have fallen into the weakness of asking a new token of divine love, thus undervaluing former favors. If the evidence we have already received of our Lord’s grace and power is not enough, when will our doubts be ended?

In this demand for a sign, our Lord’s foes were “tempting him”. Did the temptation lie in urging him to seek his own glory by some ostentatious display of power, for which there would be no real need? Whatever it was, our Lord passed scathless through this ordeal, for there was no pride in him. Pharisees and Sadducees will tempt us also. From their wiles and smiles may the Lord deliver us! From the desire to stand well with men may we be happily freed by our love to Jesus!

12. *And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation.*

Unbelief always pricked him to the heart, and greatly grieved him. When men trusted him, he delighted to exhibit his matchless grace; but when they caviled and questioned, his heart was heavy, and he turned away from them.

13. *And he left them, and entering into the ship again departed to the other side.*

But, alas! even on board that little ship there was unbelief; and from the small

and select circle of his own disciples he had fresh reason for sorrow from the same cause.

14. *Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf.*

They had forgotten to victual their boat. They seldom forgot such temporal matters. Possibly they trusted each other, and what was every man's business was nobody's business. They did not notice the omission while they were crossing the sea; but mealtime came, and their minds were quickly brought to think of the loaves. Controversy had for a while engrossed their minds with religious matters; but lack of bread, and consequent hunger soon recalled them to the things of earth.

15. *And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.*

He used a parabolic expression, which they would readily have understood, had not their minds been already absorbed by their lack of bread. He saw that in them, too, there would soon be a desire for a sign, now that they needed bread; and he feared the influence of both the Ritualism of the Pharisee upon his little church.

16. *And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread.*

Their thoughts ran along the low material level from leaven to bread. Did they imagine that he forbade their borrowing leaven from the Pharisees when they began to make a batch of bread? How could they have found any meaning in the literal sense of leaven as applied to Sadducees? They were earthbound by anxiety, or they could not have blundered so foolishly. When a number of hungry men are together, is it not very natural that they should look at everything with hungry eyes? Yes, it is natural; and it is not natural to men to be spiritual. We need to pray that we may not reason among ourselves after the same groveling fashion, when we come into a little need.

17-21. *And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember? When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?*

Can we not learn from past experience? If the Lord has helped us before, is he not equally ready to held us again? What! when there are only a few of you disciples on board ship, do you begin to distrust your Lord because you have only one loaf, when he found enough food for five thousand and for four thousand out of a few scanty loaves? O ye unbelieving children of God, what infinite patience your gracious God has with you, though you so often and so shamefully doubt him! “Do ye not remember?” “How is it that ye do not understand?” Can it be that all your Lord’s lessons of love and deeds of kindness have taught you nothing? Do you still doubt him—still distrust him? Has he delivered you in six troubles, and can you not trust him in the seventh? Has he kept you, by his grace, till you are seventy years of age, and can you not trust him for the few remaining years of your earthly pilgrimage? Oh, shame upon us that we are such dull scholars in the school of Christ!

22-25. *And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly.*

Our Savior very frequently healed the sick by a touch, for he intended to impress upon us the truth that the infirmities of fallen humanity can only be removed by contact with his own blessed humanity. He had, however, other lessons to teach,

and therefore he adopted other methods of action in healing the sick. Moreover, it was wise for other reasons to manifest variety in his methods. Had our Lord cast all his miracles in one mould men would have attached undue importance to the manner by which he wrought, and would have superstitiously thought more of it than of the divine power by which the miracle was accomplished. Accordingly, our Master presents us with great variety in the form of the miracles. Though they are always fraught with the same goodness, and display the same wisdom and the same power, yet he is careful to make each one distinct from its fellow, that we may behold the manifest goodness of God, and may not imagine that the divine Savior is so short of methods as to need to repeat himself.

26. *And he sent him away to his house, saying, Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town.*

"Your house is outside Bethsaida, so go round-about, and get home without going into the town; and if any of your neighbors call to see you, say nothing about me to them, for I wish to remain concealed for the present."

27. *And Jesus went out, and his disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way he asked his disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am?*

It was Christ's usual way, when he took a walk with his disciples, to beguile the time with holy conversation. It would be well if we always did the same. We might do much good, and we might get much good, if we made our Lord Jesus the theme of our talks "by the way." It was an important question that he put to his disciples, "Whom do men say that I am?"

28, 29. *And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.*

These wore all conjectures, and far from the mark; yet was there some likeness to truth in them all. Herod's notion that Jesus was John the Baptist, newly risen from the dead, seemed a probable one to many, since our Lord had like courage and fidelity with John. Elijah, too, seemed to live again in our Lord's words of

fire. Since many of these were types of him, it is small wonder that he should seem to be identical with them. Yet men make no discovery of the Lord's true character by their own guesswork: only those to whom he reveals himself will ever know him.

Error has many voices; truth alone is one, and abiding. Men say differing things concerning our Lord; but his Spirit alone bears effectual witness to the one true Christ of God.

29. *And he saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?*

This is a far more searching question. Our personal thoughts of Jesus touch a vital point. Our Lord presupposes that his disciples would not have the same thoughts as "men" had. They would not follow the spirit of the age, and shape their views by those of the "cultured" persons of the period. They would have formed a judgment, each one for himself, by what they, had heard and seen while in his company. Therefore, he enquired, "But whom say ye that I am?" Let each reader answer the question before he goes further.

29. *And Peter answereth and saith unto him, Thou art the Christ.*

Peter, as usual, was spokesman for the rest; and he spoke right well. He had perceived the Messiahship of his Lord, and in outspoken words he uttered his inward belief. It was a simple but satisfactory Confession of Faith. We should always be ready to give an answer to those who would know what we believe on a matter so central as the person and nature of our Lord. A mistake on this point would involve all our religion in failure. If he is not to us the Christ, the Lord's Anointed, we know not Jesus aright.

30. *And he charged them that they should tell no man of him.*

He wished, at that time, to remain in comparative retirement; he was not anxious that his miracles should be blazoned abroad. By-and-by, he was to die; and he preferred to derive his fame from his death rather than from his life, and to gather his honors from his cross rather than from his miracles.

He never bade any man to be silent about his death on the cross; but when honor

was likely to come to him among men from his miracles, he frequently “charged them that they should tell no man of him.” That restriction is no longer in force; it was entirely abrogated after our Lord’s resurrection, when he said to his disciples, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”

31-32. *And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he spake that saying openly.*

Our Lord began to prepare his disciples for the time when they would have to act alone, because he would be taken from them. Their first great trial would be his death, of which he had spoken darkly before. There is a fit time for painful disclosures, and our Lord is wise in selecting it. He mentions the gathering together of his foes: “elders and chief priests and scribes” will eagerly unite. Their fury will show itself in multiplied cruelties: he will suffer many things. He declares that they will push their enmity to the bitter end; he will “be killed.” He foretells that he will “be raised again” and he specifies the time, namely, “the third day.” All this must have fallen sadly on the ears of men who still indulged visions of a kingdom of a very different sort. The most of them were wisely silent in their sadness, yet there was one who had far too bold a tongue.

And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

Peter could not be trusted as steward or major-domo. He takes too much upon himself. See, how great he is! He half fancies that he is the master. He loved his Lord so well that he could not bear to hear of his being killed, and he would gladly stop him from talking upon a subject so terribly sad. He thinks the Lord is morbid, and is attaching more importance to the opposition of the Pharisees than it deserves. Therefore he gets the Lord alone, and chides him. The words are very strong: “Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.” He meant to be his Lord’s candid friend, and at the same time to maintain towards him that respectful bearing which would be becoming in his follower; but evidently he

took too much on himself when he ventured to rebuke his Lord. He could see in our Lord's death nothing but ruin to the cause, and therefore he felt it must not be. He would even drive such an idea out of our Lord's mind. Should we not have done the same, had we been there, if we had been as much concerned for the honor of our Lord as Peter was? Should we not have been horror-stricken at the idea that such a One as he should be put to a cruel death?

33. *But when he had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.*

Our Lord was superior to the temptation which grew out of the very love of his friend. He would remain no longer aside with Peter: he turned away from him. Seeing the devil using Peter as his instrument, he addresses Satan himself, and Peter too, so far as he was identified with the evil suggestion. "Get thee behind me, Satan." The attempt was made to put a stumbling-block in that path of self-sacrifice which our Lord intended to pursue, even to the bitter end. He spied out the hindrance, and said, "Thou art an offense unto me." His dearest friend was his direst foe when he would put him off from his life-work The devil thought to succeed through our Lord's newly appointed foreman; but Jesus made short work of the temptation: he threw the stone out of the road, and cast it behind him, so that he could not be stumbled. The pith of the error was that Peter looked at things from the point of view of human honor and success, and not from that grand standpoint in which the glory of God in the salvation of men swallows up everything.

A marvel is here. A man may know what only the Father can reveal, and yet he may not savor the things, that be of God. Unless he accepts the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, he has no savor for divine things. He who does not heartily rejoice in the atonement does not discern that sweet savor of rest which the Lord God perceives in the great sacrifice, and therefore he has no fellowship in the things that be of God. He knows not the taste, the aroma, the essence of spiritual things; and however much he may honor Jesus in words, he is an enemy, yea, a real Satan towards the true Christ, whose very substance is his work as our atoning sacrifice. Those who at this day revile the substitutionary sacrifice of our Lord, are fonder of the things that be of men than those that be of God. They are loud in their claim to be great philanthropists; but sound theologians they are not.- Humanitarians they may be; but divines they cannot be. They may be the friends

of man; but they are not the servants of God. How sorrowfully do we write these words when we think of the many preachers to whom they apply!

34. *And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

As our Lord, to fulfill his destiny, must sacrifice himself, so also must every one who would be his follower. To keep close to our Lord (which he intends by the words “come after me,”) we must have done with self; for he denied himself to redeem his people. We must not know self, nor assent to it; but we must each one “deny himself.” Doing this, each man must cheerfully shoulder his own personal burden of sorrow and service, and carry it with self-sacrifice, as Jesus carried his cross.

He had told them of his cross; now he tells them of their own crosses. They might now choose again whether they could and would follow him. With their increased information as to his destiny, the question was again set before them, whether they would follow or forsake him. If they did continue to be his followers, it must be as cross-bearers and self-deniers. Nor are the terms altered in these days. Do we accept them? Can we keep step in the long procession of cross-carriers, or will we fall in with the spirit of the age, and say fine things about Jesus, while we deny his substitutionary sacrifice, and shirk the personal self - denial which he demands? Our own wisdom, if it leads us to think lightly of “the precious blood”, must be utterly denied and even abhorred.

35. *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.*

Now they were to practice the doctrine he had taught them before. They could only save their real selves by the loss of this present life; but if they settled it in their own minds that they must first and foremost save their outer life, it would be at the expense of their truest being. To tell them plainly of this was honest dealing on our Lord’s part; and it argued well for the disciples that they still remained faithful to him. Alas! there was one even of the chosen twelve who probably at this very moment was scheming how he could continue to keep the bag, and yet could ultimately escape from the consequences of his Master’s

demand.

36, 37. *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

If he loses his real life, how can he profit, even if the world be his? The true gain or loss is a gain or loss of life. All external things are trifles compared with that life. Even now, “What shall it profit a man a man?” He has no real life in Christ, and what is all else that he may possess? What but a painted pageantry with which he is amusing his soul upon the brink of hell? As to the world to come, there is no question. To lose eternal life is overwhelming loss indeed. Nothing can be compared with eternal life. The soul’s value cannot be estimated by ordinary reckonings. Worlds on worlds were a poor price.

37. *Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

Barter is out of the question. His soul is so a man’s sole inheritance that if he has lost it he has lost all.

38. *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed,*

What a grave warning is this for the cowardly believer! Can a nonconfessing faith save? To live and die without confessing Christ before men is to run an awful risk. Actually to recant and give up Christ must be a dreadful crime, and the penalty is fearful to contemplate. Disowned by Jesus before his Father who is in heaven! What hell can be worse?

You must be able to say distinctly, I am not ashamed to avow that my heart is given to Jesus the crucified. As he espoused my cause publicly before a gazing world, so I espouse his. I his cross have taken, all else to leave, if it be necessary, that I may fob him. He is my Lord, to him I will submit; he is my trust, on him I lean; he is my hope, for him I look.” Do not try the plan which some are attempting, of being Christians in the dark. Put on Christ.

when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

There will come a day when Christ, from the judgment-seat, will make it appear who was wise in his way of life; for then shall the reward or the punishment throw its light on the past conduct of men. He who was himself despised shall be the Rewarder of those who laid down their lives for the sake of his cause. In that day the crucified “Son of man shall come in glory”: that glory will be seen to be “the glory of his Father”; that divine glory will be illustrated by hosts of attendant angels.

Mark 9

1. *And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.*

So near was that reign which would repay the losses of the saints for Christ's sake, that before certain of them were dead the Lord would have held a rehearsal of it in his judgment of Israel, by the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and would have set up his kingdom, of which the judgment- seat is an index and an instrument.

We have here a difficult passage, and this appears to be the simplest way of reading it in its connection. Our Lord seems to say, "Through suffering and death I pass to a throne; and by that fact it shall be seen that loss and death are often the way to true gain and real life. That kingdom of mine is not far away and unreal: some of you will see me in the exercise of my royal power before you die."

Yet it has been thought that it means that some would never really taste of death, or know the fullness of its terrible meaning, till the judgment day. This is true, but it can scarcely be the teaching in this place.

2, 3. *And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves:*

Were these "six days," a week's quiet interval, in which our Lord prepared himself for the singular transaction upon the "mountain apart"? Did the little company of three know from one Sabbath to another that such an amazing joy awaited them? The three were elect out of the elect, and favored to see what none else in all the world might behold. Doubtless our Lord had reasons for his

choice, as he has for every choice he makes; but he does not unveil them to us. The same three beheld the agony in the garden; perhaps the first sight was necessary to sustain their faith under the second.

The name of the “high mountain” can never be known; for those who knew the locality have left no information. Tabor, if you please; Hermon, if you prefer it. No one can decide. It was a lone and lofty hill.

and he was transfigured before them. And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.

The splendor of the Lord shone out. His face, lit up with its own inner glory, became a sun; and all his dress, like clouds irradiated by that sun became white as the light itself. “He was transfigured before them”: he alone was the center of what they saw. It was a marvelous unveiling of the hidden nature of the Lord Jesus. Then was, in one way, fulfilled the word of John: “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.”

The transfiguration occurred but once: special views of the glory of Christ are not enjoyed every day. Our highest joy on earth is to see Jesus. There can be no greater bliss in heaven; but we shall be better able to endure the exceeding bliss when we have laid aside the burden of this flesh.

4. *And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus.*

Thus the Law and the Prophets, “Elias with Moses”, communed with our Lord, “talking with Jesus”; and entering into familiar conversation with their Lord. Saints long departed still live; live in their personality; are known by their names; and enjoy near access to Christ. It is a great joy to holy ones to be with Jesus: they find it heaven to be where they can talk with him. The heads of former dispensations conversed with the Lord as to his decease, by which a new economy I would be ushered in. After condescending so long to his ignorant followers, it must have been a great relief to the human soul of Jesus to talk with two master-minds like those of Moses and Elijah. What a sight for the apostles, this glorious trio! They “appeared unto them”, but they “talked with Jesus”: the object of the two holy ones was not to converse with apostles, but with their

Master. Although saints are seen of men, their fellowship is with Jesus.

5, 6. *And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid.*

The sight spoke to the three beholders, and they felt bound to answer to it. Peter must speak: "Then answered Peter." That which is uppermost comes out: "Master, it is good for us to be here." Everybody was of his opinion. Who would not have been? Because it was so good, he would fain stay in this beatific state, and get still more good from it. But he has not lost his reverence, and therefore he would have the great ones sheltered suitability. He offers that, with his brethren, he will plan and build shrines for the three holy ones: "Let us make here three tabernacles." He does not propose to build for himself, and James, and John; but he says, "One for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."

His talk sounds rather like that of a bewildered child. He wanders a little; yet his expression is a most natural one. Who would not wish to abide in such society as this? Moses, and Elias, and Jesus: what company! But yet how unpractical is Peter! How selfish the one thought, "It is good for us!" What was to be done for the rest of the twelve, and for the other disciples, and for the wide, wide world? A sip of such bliss might be good for the three, but to continue to drink thereof might not have been really good even for them. Peter knew not what he said. The like might be said of many another excited utterance of enthusiastic saints.

7. *And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.*

The voice was clear and distinct. First came the divine attestation of the Sonship of our Lord, "This is my beloved Son." What happiness for us that Jehovah is well pleased in Christ, and with all who are in him! Then followed the consequent divine requirement, "Hear him." It is better to hear the Son of God than to see saints, or to build tabernacles. This will please the Father more than all else that love can suggest.

The good pleasure of the Father in the Lord Jesus is a conspicuous part of his

glory. The voice conveyed to the ear a greater glory than the luster of light could communicate through the eye. The audible part of the transfiguration was as wonderful as the visible; in fact, it would seem, from the next verse, to have been more so.

8. *And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.*

Unhappy, indeed, would they have been if they had looked about and seen none but Moses, for poor comfort could Moses bring. Or if, looking around, they had seen none but Elias, for the stern prophet of fire would have been but a poor consolation to them in their life struggles. But Moses may go, and Elijah may go. Lawgiver and prophet may vanish so long as Jesus Christ remains it is enough. Jesus only is enough for all our wants—for all our desires.

9, 10. *And as they came down from the mountain, he charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.*

You see the great modesty and patience of our Lord. Though these three favored apostles might see his glory, and afterwards bear witness concerning it, yet for the time being they must hold their tongues. All this glory, and only three men to see it, and these three must be quite silent!

Our Lord seeketh not honor from men; neither ought we to do so. His mind was even then occupied with thoughts of his great sacrifice. When he spoke to Moses and Elias, his theme was, “his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem,” and when he spoke with these three eyewitnesses of his majesty, the subject of his converse was his own death and resurrection. That was the object on which his heart’s affection was set.

11. *And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?*

One by one the difficulties of the disciples are stated to their Lord, and their solution is soon given. One of these concerned Elijah; and as he had been just now before them, they were led to mention it. “Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?” This is the report of men who have studied our Scriptures, that Elias comes before the Lord’s appearing. No doubt it staggered their minds when they had it put in some such logical fashion as this,—

Messiah cannot come till Elijah has appeared;
Elijah has not appeared;
Therefore Jesus is not the Messiah.

12, 13. *And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things, and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at naught. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come—John the Baptist was he. And they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.*

“And he answered”: he has an answer for all questions, and we shall do well to bring our difficulties to him to hear his replies. Our Lord admits that Elias must come before the Messiah: “Elias verily cometh first”; but he asserts that the person intended by the prophecy had come already. John the Baptist was Elijah redivivus. He was a stern admonisher of kings, and preached repentance to Israel. He had come to restore all things: and so the Messiah had not appeared without being preceded by the true Elias.

The evil ones “have done unto him whatsoever they listed.” This cleared up the doubt at once. What had been done to the true Elias would also be done to himself, the Messiah. Jesus himself must die by a cruel death: “He must suffer many things, and be set at naught.” How simple the explanation of the difficulty! How often has, it happened that we have been looking for that which has already come, or have been perplexed by a doctrine which, when it has been opened to us by the Holy Spirit, has proved full of instruction and comfort. Without divine teaching we drown in the shadows; but with it we swim the fathomless deeps.

14, 15. *And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and*

running to him saluted him.

The probability is that the face of Jesus Christ was shining like the face of Moses when he came down from the mount, and the people were amazed though not with that same amazement which seized upon Israel when they saw the face of Moses, for Moses had to cover his face with a veil. But they ran to him and saluted him. The glory of Christ attracts, whereas the glory of Moses repels. The glory of the law is terrible, but the glory of the Gospel is cheering and attractive.

16. *And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them?*

Like some great commander stepping into the field when his under followers are being beaten, he comes right to the front and charges the foe boldly. Christ said, "What question ye with them?"—as much as to say, "Why did ye not wait a bit and ask me. I could have answered you if they can not."

17, 18. *And one the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit, and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foreseeth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: And I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not.*

Down from communion with saints, and the confirmation of his claims by the Father's voice, our Lord comes to give battle to the devil. Our Moses descends from the mount, and finds evil exultant in the multitude below. During his absence, the enemy had triumphed over his feeble followers. In the midst of jeering adversaries, the disciples had tried in vain to cast out an evil spirit from a youth who had been rendered lunatic by its horrible possession. The poor disappointed father appeals to the Lord at once most humbly, states the case clearly, and pleads most fittingly. His epileptic son was a lunatic, sore sexed with pain, and in grievous peril through sudden falls. The case was a shocking one to have in one's presence: the cries and contortions which attend epilepsy are frequently terrible to hear and see. The disciples had evidently done their very best; and as they had on other occasions cast out devils, they were surprised to find themselves defeated; but defeated they were, for the despairing father truthfully cried, "I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they

could not." Alas, poor man, thou didst but speak as all have done since, when they have trusted in disciples, and not alone in their Master!

19. *He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?*

I suppose our Lord's rebuke was meant specially for his disciples. It was something like the speech of a schoolmaster, who, having taught his pupils the same lesson a great many times, and labored hard with them, from year to year, yet finds them failing in the very elements of knowledge. Christ does not speak as if he were tired of his life, and wished to get away from his disciples; but this is his way of saying how disappointed he is that these learners have learnt so little.

bring him unto me.

That is a grand piece of advice, and a blessed word of permit—"Bring him unto me." There is no case so bad but, if you bring it to Jesus, he can meet it. "Bring him unto me." Now, good woman, bring your daughter's case to Christ tonight in prayer while you are sitting in the pew. Now, come, brother, bring the case of your son who seems utterly to be abandoned to vice. Bring the case before Christ tonight. "Bring him unto me." Oh, who would not bring his friend—his wife? Who would not bring her husband or her child unto Jesus Christ? "Bring him unto me."

20. *And they brought him unto him:*

Some came to help the father, probably the bringing of the young man was too much an effort for one alone. "They brought him unto him." Two or three of you with united prayer can do what, peradventure, one man's prayer would not. Come, help one another. "Bear ye one another's burdens" in prayer. I would suggest that, if one of you should have an ungodly son who causes you trouble, you should communicate with some few of your brethren and sisters in Christ, and say, "Let us conjointly make this case a matter of prayer till God hears us." And then you must take up a case of theirs, you know, turn and turn about, and see whether God does not in answer to prayer bless one after another that you

thus bring to Christ. I know what the result will be, if it be honestly tried in simple confidence in the power of Jesus.

and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him,

As soon as ever Christ looked at him, "the spirit tare him." One look from Christ awakes the devil. Sometimes, sinners are worse for a time when Christ looks upon them. The devil always has great wrath, when he knoweth that his time is short; and he rages and tears most violently when he is about to be ejected. The Jews have a proverb, "When the tale of bricks is doubled, Moses appears," and we may make it into a Scriptural proverb, "When the devil's torment of the heart is doubled, then Jesus appears to cast him out."

and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.

And Jesus, instead of curing him at once, gave his first attention to the other patient before him, namely, the father of the child, He was suffering from an equally bad disease, though the symptoms were different, and Jesus meant to cure him as well as his boy.

21. *And he asked his father, how long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, of a child.*

And having begun with that sorrowful subject, the father, with the painful eloquence of pity, went on to tell the tale of woe—

22. *And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.*

Here was unbelief, it is true; but there was with it a pitying entreaty that meant more faith than it could express. Men do not usually beg where they expect nothing, and they do not make pitiful entreaties with tears unless they have some hope. Even though it was almost covered up, still the Savior fastened on that one utterance of unbelief: "if."

23. *Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.*

Hear that, any of you who have come in here, desiring to be delivered from sin, to be made holy, to break off old habits, and to become new men in Christ Jesus. "All things are possible to him that believeth." So, take courage, trust in Christ, and cry unto him to save you.

24. *And straightway the father of the child, cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

There were within him two men, as it were, a believing man, and an unbelieving man, and the two struggled for mastery; "Lord, I do believe; but there is so much unbelief in me, I pray thee to drive it out, that I may believe in thee wholly."

There was faith, even though it was mixed with unbelief. It was a faith that made him pray, as I have already told you, and the Lord Jesus Christ found out where the faith was. He had, as it were, broken the great black lump of dead coal that looked to be nothing but unbelief, and there was the living light of faith burning in the very center of it.

25. *When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him.*

That is Christ's way of curing. Our Lord does not save sinners as some say that he does, just for a short time, and then let his work all grumble back to nothingness. This would be unworthy of himself, and unworthy of that gracious Spirit by whom he works. No, if he casts out a devil, he shall enter no more into the one he formerly tormented.

26. *And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him:*

It must obey Christ. The Master bids that dog of a devil to lie down, and he must do so. It shows what an abject creature, after all, the prince of darkness is; he

must obey the voice of Christ. Lord, speak to him at this moment, and drive him out of other souls by thine omnipotent word!

and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead.

As old Thomas Fuller says, the devil knew that he had to go out, so, like a bad tenant, he did all the mischief he could before he left. Satan often acts in this fashion; just when Christ has come to cast him out, he drives the poor soul into deeper despair, and perhaps into greater sin than he ever fell into in all his life before.

27. *But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose.*

He was not dead, though many thought he was, and said so. Christ does not cure and then kill, he cures so that we shall never die. No, no, poor sinner, the last pangs of despair shall not destroy you, the fiercest, bitterest assaults of Satan shall not cause you to die: Christ will take you by the hand, and you shall arise.

28–29. *And when he was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

There are some things, which we are not fit to do until we have drawn very near to God, and have been deeply humbled, and, with sincere repentance, and the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, have been cleaned so as to receive so great a boon. Faith alone will not accomplish everything. Faith must be accompanied by prayer, and prayer must be at least sometimes, in special cases, attended with fasting. The Lord makes reserves of his mercies, which he does not give immediately even to the request of faith, he demands importunity on our part, and heart-searching, and heart-cleansing, before the blessing will be bestowed.

30–32. *And they departed thence, and passed through Galilee; and he would not that any man should know it. For he taught his disciples, and said unto them, The Son of man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise*

the third day. But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him.

Our Lord returned often to the solemn subject of his death at the hands of men. It was on his own mind, and therefore he spake of it to his disciples. Their minds were far too receptive of other notions in reference to his kingdom, and therefore he set before them the truth again and again, almost in the same words. He would banish all dreams of a worldly monarchy from their souls. His death would be a grievous trial to them, and he would prepare them for it. He now speaks of his being betrayed: this was ever a bitter drop in his cup of gall. The Son of man comes to save men, and is, by a man, "delivered into the hands of men." For man he lived, by man he is betrayed, and by man he died. Full well he foresaw that "they shall kill him." O suicidal world! Will nothing content thee but the blood of God's own Son?

His penetrating mind realized death, and anticipated that third day, when the word would be fulfilled, — "He shall be raised again." This was the light of the morning which would have banished the darkness of despair from the minds of the disciples, if they had understood and believed. An old writer says, "He sugared the bitter pill of his death with the sweetness o£ his assured resurrection."

33–34. *And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest.*

It was a dreadful descent from communing with Moses and Elias on the mount of transfiguration to meeting the furious demon at the hill-foot; but this looks like a far greater descent, from the self-sacrifice of the Divine Master to the petty jealousies and self-seeking of his chosen servants. Oh, sometimes, it makes our hearts sick—when we have been almost lost in rapturous meditation, when we have been taken up well-nigh to heaven in communion with the Lord, and then we have had to attend to some paltry squabble between two brothers or two sisters! It does seem such a terrible come-down, yet our Lord and Master does not disdain thus to come down, for in tenderness he deals with these diseases of the sheep like a good shepherd.

35, 36. *And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child and set him in the midst of them: and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,*

Perhaps they were jealous of Peter; possibly they were even more jealous of James and John. So the Lord gently pacifies them; he does not impatiently say, "I cannot enter into your disputes, I cannot be worried with you." Oh, no! but he just sits down, and talks with them. I like that picture, it is almost as grand as the group of Christ and his disciples at the supper table in the upper room. "He sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all." That is the way they come to be first, by being wiring to be last of all, and the servant of all. This is the only way to get to the front of Christ's army; he who would be chief, must always be aiming at the rear rank, willing to do the most humble service, and to be the lowest menial in his Master's service. Only in this way can we rise. In Christ's kingdom, the way to go up is to go down. Sink self, and you shall surely rise.

37. *Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.*

It is no small thing to be able to appreciate humble and lowly characters. To receive one childlike believer in Christ's name is to receive Christ. To delight in a lowly, trustful character is to delight in Christ. If we count it a joy to do service to such persons, we may be sure that we are therein serving our Lord. Those who receive little ones in Christ's name will grow like them, and so in another way will receive Christ into their own souls.

38. *And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.*

John in this case was like a good many people at the present day. You notice it. They could not cast out the devils themselves, and when they found somebody

else that did it, they forbade his doing it because he did not follow with them. I have known learned, eloquent, respectable ministers who cannot save sinners. And they hear that certain poor, illiterate, uneducated men have snatched sinners like brands from the burning, and they forbid them to do what they cannot do themselves. It is insanity—that would stop any man from doing what God enables him to do; and we ought to be the very last to forbid others from doing it.

39. *But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.*

These people were dissenters, we may say—a sort of outsiders. And John puts forth the whole power of his apostolical authority to put them down; and then Jesus Christ puts forth the full power of his divine authority to give them liberty to go on.

40. *For he that is not against us is on our part.*

Thus the Master had to talk to his poor disciples after having conversed with Moses and Elias. Again, I say, what a come-down it was from fellowship with the great law-giver of Israel, and with the mighty prophet of fire, to talk with these childish men who had fallen out among themselves, and fallen out with other people! O blessed Master, we may fain hope that thou wilt commune with us as thou didst commune with them! We may also trust that some poor sinner, even though the devil may be in him, may catch thine eye of pity and love, and that thou mayest heal him.

41. *For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.*

Much loyalty to the King may be expressed by little kindnesses to his servants, and perhaps more by kindness to the little ones among them than by friendship with the greater sort. To love a poor and despised child of God for Christ’s sake shows greater love to Christ than if we love the honorable, and amiable, and rich members of his church.

Acts of love are divinely estimated rather by motive than by measure. “A cup” may mean as much from one as banquet from another. Cold water has a special value in a hot climate; but this text makes it precious anywhere. Giving refreshment may be made a choice means of fellowship with holy men, if we give it because they are disciples; and specially so when persecuting governments make it penal to succor the saints in any way.

Though every kindly deed is its own reward, yet the Lord promises a further recompense. What we give for Christ’s sake is insured against loss by the promise of the text, by the “Verily, I say unto you”, which confirms it, and by the use of the negative “in no wise”, which shuts out all possibility of its being otherwise.

42. *And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.*

To bless a little one is to entertain the Savior himself. To set one’s self to pervert the simple, or to molest the humble, will be the sure way to a tremble doom.

Little ones which believe in Jesus are specially under his guardian care, and only the desperately malicious will attack them, or seek to make them stumble. Such an evil person will gain nothing, even should he win the easy victory he looks for: he will, on the contrary, be preparing for himself a terrible retribution. It were better for him that the biggest of milestone, such as would be used in a mill worked by an ass, were hanged about his neck, and that he, himself, were then hurled overboard, and drowned in the depth of the sea. He will surely, sink infamously, sink never to rise again. The haters of the humble are among the worst of men, for their enmity is unprovoked. They may hope to rise by oppressing or duping the simple-hearted; but such conduct will prove their certain destruction sooner or later. It is the lowly Lord of the lowly who pronounces this condemnation; and he is soon to be the Judge of quick and dead.

43. *And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:*

We had better be hindered in our work than drawn aside into temptation. The most dexterous hand must not be spared if it encourages us in doing evil. It is not because a certain thing may make us clever and successful, that therefore we are to allow it: if it should prove to be the frequent cause of our falling into sin, we must have done with it, and place ourselves at a disadvantage for our life-work, rather than ruin our whole being by sin. Holiness is to be our first object: everything else must take a very secondary place. Anything is better than the loss of your soul. It is better to lose the greatest joy, skill, comfort, honor, that you ever had, than to lose your soul for ever.

44–46. *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

That is the second time he said these words. Our Lord was not fond of dreadful metaphors and terrible language, but he knew that they must be used, though some of his servants shrink from the use of them. Are they more loving than he is? Is it, after all, a greater love for souls that makes men keep back terrible truths? Is it not more honest and loving to tell the whole truth, whatever it may be? It is harder to speak, but does it not show a tenderer heart to be able to speak so as to warn men of their peril? If anything should seem as necessary to you as your foot, so that you can make no progress in life without it, yet if it would cost you your soul, give it up. Just as it would be better to live without a foot than to die, so is it better to go to heaven without even the necessaries of life on the road than to perish everlastingly.

47, 48. *And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out:*

Notice how severe our Savior is, how deep he goes. He does not say, “Shut it, cover it up with a green shade;” but, “Pluck it out.”

It is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than having two eyes to be cast into hellfire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

That is the third time he has uttered those terrible words; then they must mean something, what do they mean? Can they mean anything less than everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord? Oh, that we might be prepared to sacrifice everything rather than be lost for ever! Dear hearts, are you saved or not? If you are not saved, see first to this all-important business; let everything else go sooner than that, in eternity, you should find yourself for ever shut in where hope can never come.

49, 50. *For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.*

Thus he speaks to those whom he enrolls in his kingdom. In their character there is a preserving force to keep the rest of society from utter corruption. If they were not scattered among men, the race would putrefy. But if they are Christians only in name, and the real power is gone, nothing can save them, and they are of no use whatever to those among whom they mingle. There is a secret something, which is the secret of the believer’s power: that something is savor: it is not easy to define it, but yet it is absolutely essential to usefulness.

The great lesson is, that if grace itself fails to save a man, nothing else can be done for him. “If the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will yet season it?” You can salt meat, but you cannot salt salt: if grace fails everything fails. Gracious Master, do not permit me to try any experiments as to how far I may lose my savor; but ever keep me full of grace and truth.

Mark 10

1, 2. *And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again. And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him.*

Here are these vipers again! What perseverance in malice! Little cared they for instruction, yet they assumed the air of enquirers. In truth, they were upon the catch, and were ready to dispute with him whatever he might say. The question is cunningly worded. “Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?” The looser the terms of a question, the more likely is it to entangle the person interrogated. Their own consciences might have told them that the marriage bond is not to be severed for any and every reason that a man likes to mention. Yet it was a question much disputed at the time, whether a man could send away his wife at pleasure, or whether there must be some serious reason alleged. Whatever Jesus might say, the Pharisees meant to use his verdict against him.

3, 4. *And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.*

Every reader of the passage in the books of Moses which is here referred to will be struck with the Pharisees’ unfair rendering of it. In Deuteronomy 24:1,2, we read: “When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man’s wife.” Moses commanded nothing in this instance; but barely

tolerated, and greatly limited a custom then in vogue. To set Moses against Moses is not a new device; but the Pharisees would hardly venture to set Moses against God, and make him command an alteration of a divine law ordained from the beginning; yet our Lord made them see that they would have to do this to maintain the theory of easy divorce. The fact is, that Moses found divorce in existence to an almost unlimited extort, and he wisely commenced its overthrow by curtailing the custom rather than by absolutely forbidding it at once. They were not allowed to send away a wife with a hasty word, but must make a deliberate, solemn ceremonial of it by preparing and giving a writing of divorcement; and this was only allowed in a special case: "because he hath found some uncleanness in her." Although many of the Pharisees spirited away this last limitation, and considered that the enactment in Deuteronomy sanctioned almost unlimited divorce, they were not unanimous in the matter, and were perpetually disputing over it. Hence there were many ways in which our Lord's decision could be turned against him, whatever it might be.

5. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.*

Moses tolerated and circumscribed an evil custom which he knew that such a people would not relinquish after its having been established among them for so long a time. They could not bear a higher law, and so he treated them as persons diseased with hardness of heart, hoping to lead them back to an older and better state of things by possible stages. As impurity ceased, and as the spirit of true religion would influence the nation, the need for divorce, and even the least desire for it, would die out. There was no provision in paradise for Adam's putting away Eve; there was no desire for divorce in the golden age. The enactment of the Mosaic law of divorce was modern and temporary; and in the form into which a loose interpretation of Scripture had distorted it, it was not defensible.

6-9. *But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

Our Lord honors Holy Scripture by drawing his argument therefrom. He chose specially to set his seal upon a part of the story of creation — that story which modern critics speak of as if it were fable or myth. He took his hearers back to the beginning when God made them male and female, and made them sons. “In the image of God created he him; male and female created he them “(Genesis 1:27). The woman was taken out of man, and Adam truly said, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). By marriage this unity is set forth and embodied under divine sanction. This oneness is of the most real and vital kind: “They are no more twain, but one flesh.” All other ties are feeble compared with this: even father and mother must stand second to the wife: “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and, shall cleave to his wife.” Being divinely appointed, this union must not be broken by the caprice of men: “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Our Lord thus decides for the life-long perpetuity of the marriage bond, in opposition to those who allowed divorce for “every cause”, which very frequently meant for no cause whatever,

10-12. *And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.*

Fornication makes the guilty person a fit subject for just and lawful divorce; for it is a virtual disannulling of the marriage bond. In a case of fornication, upon clear proof, the tie can be loosed; but in no other case. Any other sort of divorce is by the law of God null and void, and it involves the persons who act upon it in the crime of adultery. Whoso marrieth her who is put away doth commit adultery; since she is not really divorced, but remains the wife of her former husband. Our King tolerates none of those enactments which, in certain countries, trifle with the bonds of matrimony. Nations may make what laws they dare, but they cannot alter facts: persons once married are, in the sight of God, married for life, with the one exception of proven fornication.

13. *And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them.*

They thought them too little, too insignificant, and that the Master had greater things to do; but he thinketh not so. None are too little for him. He receiveth even childish honors to himself.

14. *But when Jesus saw it he was much displeased, and said unto them,*

Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.

Many of them come into that kingdom, and all who some there must be like them. The child is not the hardest subject of conversion; nay, rather:

15. *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*

Instead of growing wiser, in order to be fit for Christ, we must be more conscious of ignorance, more trustful towards him, more dependent upon him, mere childlike.

16 *And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.*

He did not baptize them, but he did bless them. The touch of his hands meant more than pen can write. Happy children who shared that laying on of hands; for those hands were neither empty nor feeble!

17. *And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*

Here was one who thought himself first, yet he had to go last; yea, and even to go away sorrowful. He was a self-sufficient gentleman: he seemed to feel that one good thing from him would be enough, and that he could and would do it at once. He had some misgivings, or he would not have asked the question, “What

shall I do?" Perhaps, even in so admirable a life as his own, something might yet be lacking. But if it should turn out to be so, he could readily supply the lack.

He was very respectful, and addressed the Lord Jesus as "Good Master." So far, so good. His question was of great personal importance.

"What shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" Oh, that more young men would ask a similar question! It was a very suitable enquiry for an earnest person, such as he undoubtedly was. He sought eternal life, and could not be content with the honors of the hour. He only wanted to know what to do to win that eternal life, and he would set about it at once. This is a hopeful enquirer. Surely he will be a grand, convert! Let us wait a little, and we shall see.

18. *And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.*

Our Lord cared not for empty compliments, and so he asks, "Why callest thou me good?" Many modern heretics praise Jesus, and their commendations are such an insult to his glorious person that he might well say, "Why callest thou me good? "Did this man really mean it? If so, the Lord Jesus would let him know by a hint that he to whom he spake was more than man. The argument is clear: either Jesus was good, or he ought not to have called him good; but as there is none good but God, Jesus who is good must be God.

19, 20. *Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal. Do not bear false witness, Defraud not. Honor thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.*

And he probably had very cautiously and anxiously done so, yet, for all that, he had not really kept all those commands without a flaw. We are right well sure of that, but as yet his eyes were not open to see his own shortcomings. Christ tested the reality of his declaration.

21, 22. *Then Jesus beholding him loved him,*

There was so much that was amiable about him.

and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.

He knew that there was a weak point in the young man's character—that he did not yet supremely love God, but loved his wealth—that he was living for this world, after all. And are there not many such—most correct in character? No one could point to a single flaw in their morals, but they are living purely for self—altogether that they may buy and sell, and get gain. No thought of God, except a fear lest they should come under his rod, but no thought of serving him, and laying themselves out for his glory, nor much thought, either, for their fellow-men. Christ had hit the blot—marked it out for him.

23. *And the disciples were astonished at his words.*

For the Rabbis had pretty well taught that money would answer everything—that if you could give so much, and pay so much, it was all well with you. Christ went against all such teaching, and showed that, in this respect, money was of no service—in fact, that it often was a hindrance.

24. *But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that truest in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!*

Worldly possessions, apart from divine grace, have a deadening, hardening, hampering influence upon the soul. Some rich men do enter into the kingdom of heaven, but it is hard for them; very hard indeed. The temptation is to let riches rule the mind; and when that is the case, the kingdom of this world opposes the kingdom of heaven. Houses and land, and gold and silver, act as bird-lime to the soul, and prevent its rising towards heaven. This is especially the case in persecuting times; but it is sufficiently a fact in all periods of human history.

25–35. *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle, than*

for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Into this statement our Lord throws the full weight of his personality. He uses an expressive proverb, which means precisely what the words convey to the common reader. There is no sense in hunting up abstruse metaphors where the proverbial teaching is as plain as possible. He would show that wealth is far more a hindrance than a help to those who would enter into the kingdom of God: in fact, such a hindrance as to render the matter practically impossible without divine interposition. A camel is not only large, but it has humps, and how can it go through so small an opening as the eye of a needle? It could not make such a passage except by a strange miracle; nor can a rich man enter into the kingdom of God except by a marvel of grace.

How few of the rich even hear the gospel! They are too great, too fine, too busy, too proud to regard the lowly preacher of the gospel of the poor. If, perchance, they do hear the heavenly message, they have not the necessities and tribulations which drive men from the present world to seek consolation in the world to come, and so they feel no need to accept Christ. “Gold and the gospel seldom do agree.” Those who are rich in this world, in the vast majority of instances, scorn to become subjects of the kingdom in which faith is riches, and holiness is honor.

Should the rich begin the divine life, how hard it is for them to persevere amid the cares, the luxuries, the temptations of a wealthy position! The difficulties are enormous when we think of the pride of life, the flattery of rank, the danger of power, the risk of carnal security. Yet, blessed be God, we have seen rich men become poor in spirit! We have seen camels go through this needle’s eye, humps and all! We hope to see many more such miracles of almighty grace.

26. *And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved?*

No common astonishment filled them Much astounding truth they had already heard from their Master; but this exceeded all, and they were exceedingly amazed. They had previously thought that wealth was an advantage: and now they judged that if those who had riches could only be saved with surpassing difficulty, poor working-men like themselves could have no hope whatever. They were ready to despair; and therefore they put to their Lord the very natural

question, “Who then can be saved?” Even our Lord’s disciples felt themselves bewildered by his plain utterance, so hard is it to get rid of prejudices in favor of wealth.

27. *And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible.*

Jesus looked on them with pity and with love, and told them that God could do that which, apart from him, would never come to pass. To enter the kingdom is impossible to man unaided: one sin or another blocks the way. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are a sadly effective barrier to the soul when it attempts to enter the city of holiness; but God can cause those barriers to yield, and enable the soul to enter by the narrow way. He is mighty to save. With God all things, are possible. What a joyful truth for the writer and the reader! Our salvation, when we view our own weakness and the power of sin, is impossible with men. Only when we turn to God and his grace, does salvation range among the possibilities.

The rich man is set by our Lord, not at the head, but at the foot of the line of aspirants for the kingdom. Lord, my hope of being found in thy kingdom lies in thy power, and grace, and not in my possessions!

28. *Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.*

Here is another claimant for a front place. Peter answered, adding, as he seemed to think, a question needful for the full discussion of the subject. Peter speaks for his brethren: “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee,” we have done what the rich young man refused to do. He spoke as the representative of a number who had become poor for the kingdom’s sake: surely these must have a large reward. Little as these first believers had to leave, it was their all, and they had forsaken it to follow Jesus: Peter would fain hear what their recompense would be. What Peter said was true, but it was not wisely spoken. It has a selfish, grasping look, and it is worded so barely that it ought not in that fashion to have come from a servant to his Lord. After all, what have any of us to lose for Jesus compared with what we gain by him?

29, 30. *And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*

No man shall be a loser by the Lord Jesus in the long run. Every one that hath bravely forsaken the comforts of this life for Christ shall receive an hundredfold recompense. Our Lord makes up to the persecuted all that which they part with for his sake. Exiles for the truth have found a father and a brother in every Christian; a mother and a sister in every holy woman. Our Lord, by giving us his own love, and the love of our fellow-Christians, supplies a hundredfold compensation to those who have to leave wife or children for his sake In being entertained hospitably by loving brethren, saints in banishment have had their houses and lands in a sense restored to them. To be at home everywhere, is a great gain, even though for Christ's name's sake we should be exiled from our native shores. Above all, in God we have a hundredfold recompense for all that we can possibly lose for his cause; and then there is the eternal life given to us, which no mansions and estates could have procured for us. In faith of this we look forward to the reign of the saints, when even here they shall inherit the earth, and rejoice themselves in the abundance of peace. Beyond this, when time ceases, there remains endless bliss; for we shall inherit everlasting life. Oh, that we may never hesitate to be glad losers for Jesus! They who lose all for Christ will find all in Christ, and receive all with Christ.

31. *But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.*

Thus our Lord sums up his deliverance as to rich men, and gives us the aphorism now before us, which he has already illustrated, and means to repeat further on in the sixteenth verse of the next chapter. Our King is here seen arranging human positions as they appear from his throne. To his eye, many first are last, and many last are first; and he will in his kingdom place men according to the divine order.

32-34. *And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem;*

It was well known to them all that the crisis of our Savior's history was close at hand and a sort of indefinable dread was upon them all. The bravest spirit in the whole company was their blessed Lord and Master. He knew that he was going up to Jerusalem to die, so you may view him as the Sacrifice going to the altar, or as the Hero going to the conflict in which he would die and yet conquer. They were in the way going up to Jerusalem—

and Jesus went before them:

The disciples might well have been filled with holy courage as their Leader was in the van. This is true concerning the whole life of all the saints: Jesus went before them." What if trials lie beyond, and the dark river itself is in front of them, yet Jesus goes before them, so they need not fear to follow.

and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid.

They did not know much about what was to happen, but a great depression was upon their spirits. They must have wondered at the cheerful bravery of their Master when all of them were ready to turn back from this mournful march.

And he took the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.

From the number of these sentences it is clear that our Savior entered into a very detailed account of his sufferings, dwelling upon each particular which he plainly foresaw, wherein we see his prophetic character. But it is more to our point to see that he knew beforehand what it would cost him to redeem our souls. "When the Savior knew the price of pardon was his blood, his pity ne'er withdrew." He knew not only that he must die, but he knew all the circumstances of rain and shame with which that death should be attended. They should condemn him: should deliver him to the Gentiles; mock him; scourge him; spit

upon him; kill him. Thus we learn that we also should dwell in holy, grateful meditation upon every point of our Lord's passion. There is something in it. He would not himself thus have divided it out, and laid it, as it were, piece by piece, if he had not intended us to do with it as they did with the burnt-offering of old, when they divided it—a picture of what every intelligent, instructed believer should do with the passion of his Master. He should try to look into the details of the great sacrifice, and have communion with God therein. Now, albeit that this revelation of his coming shame, and sorrow, and death afflicted the hearts of his disciples, yet, for all that, observe what they did.

35. *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire.*

Strange request! First of all, read those words, "We would that thou shouldest do for us." Now the genuine spirit of a Christian is net to ask that something should be done to him, but to ask his Master, especially in such a time as that, what they could do for him. Christ was all unselfishness, but his disciples had not yet learned the lesson. "We would that thou shouldest do for us." And then see how much they indulged their ambition. "We wouldest that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we desire." And yet I question whether we are, any of us, free from this spirit; for when the Lord reproves us a little, and we have not everything our own way, how apt we are to rebel! The fact is, we have got this tincture—this gall—in us—we would that he should do for us whatsoever we shall desire. Should it be according to thy mind? Should the disciple dictate to his Master? Should the child be lord of the family?

36. *And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?*

Our Savior's question suggests to us the prudent lesson, never to promise in the dark. If anyone shall say to you, "Promise that you will do whatever I ask," follow the example of Christ and first ask, "What would you that I should do for you?" Otherwise, you may entangle yourself with your own words. These young men evidently needed to have this question put to them, for they had not themselves thoroughly considered what they were asking their Lord to do for them.

37. *They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.*

There was, undoubtedly, much that was wrong about this request, and you have often heard that view of the matter dwelt upon, so I will call your attention to that which was right about it. These disciples showed their faith that this same Jesus, who was to be mocked, and scourged, and spit upon, and killed, would yet reign; and I think it was wonderful faith that, after they had heard from his own lips, in sorrowful detail, the description of how he should die, yet nevertheless they so fully believed in his kingdom that they asked to have a share in its honors. It is true that they were ambitious, but their ambition was to be near the Savior. It would be well if all those, who ask for right hand and left hand places, wanted them at the right hand and the left hand of the Savior.

38. *But Jesus unto them, Ye know not what ye ask:*

Has the Lord ever said to us, when we have been praying, "Ye know not what ye ask"? I suppose that is usually true in a certain sense; we do not fully understand the compass of the most of our prayers, and sometimes we ask so unadvisedly that we prove that we know not what we are asking.

Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

"Can ye share my drinking in Gethsemane and my sinking on Golgotha?"

39. *And they said unto him, We can.*

They knew not what they said, but they felt that such was the strength of their love, that they could share anything that had to do with Christ! His throne! Yes, they would like to sit at the right hand of it. His cup! Yes, they can drink of it. Immersion into his suffering! Yes, they can endure that baptism.

And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be

baptized:

And so they were, for James was soon put to death, and John lived, the last and longest of the apostles, a life-long martyrdom for the Master's sake.

40. *But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.*

They are not content, you see, with being ambitious themselves: they would fire him with ambition—that humble, lowly servant of God, who had laid aside for a while the power to distribute crowns and thrones. But he does not forget himself, nor the position which he had taken up in reference to the Father, but said, "It is not mine to give."

41. *And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.*

Why were they displeased? Because they were of the same spirit as James and John. As they were displeased with James and John, it is evident that they wanted those places themselves, and many a man is thus displeased with his own faults. Did you ever see a dog bark at himself in a glass? You and I have often done that; we have even grown very angry with what was, after all, only our own image.

42. *But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.*

However, how sad the contrast is—the Master's thoughts all taken up with his death for others, and their thoughts occupied with little petty jealousies as to who should be the greatest! It is a sad thing when this creeps into Christian churches (and it still does), when souls are perishing, and this poor world wants our weeping eyes and our laborious hands, and we get quarreling about points of precedence. This brother thinks the other too forward. This one has not enough respect paid to him. This one has spoken sharply, and the other cannot bear it.

Oh! what poor disciples we are! What a blessing it is we have a patient. Master, who still bears with us, and will not leave us until he has infused his own spirit into us, which spirit is the spirit of self-denial, self-abnegation—the spirit which desireth not its own, but looketh on the things of others. God grant us all to be full of it.

43, 44. *But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*

And that is the way to be truly great in the Church of God. It is to be less and less in your own esteem, and willing to be nothing. The way up is downward That is not a contradiction, but it is a paradox. Sink, and you shall rise. Be willing to serve the very least, and you shall have honor amongst your brethren. Remember that the King of kings was the servant of servants. “Whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.”

45. *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

Christ instituted bishops, that is, overseers; but never prelates. He never had any idea of setting some men in his Church over the heads of others, but he put all his servants upon an equality. They are to exercise no lordship the one over the other, nor to seek it, for the truest honor in the Church of God is found in service. He that serves most is the greatest He that will occupy the lowest office, he that will bear patiently to be the most put upon, he that is readiest to be despised, and to be the servant of all, shall be the chiefest of all. The way to rise in the kingdom of heaven is to descend, for even so was it with our Lord himself. God give to all of us the humble and lowly spirit that will make us willing to be the least of all!

46, 47. *And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people,*

For, now, his march to the battle was like a triumphal march, which was by-and-by to be attended with the waving of palms and the shout of Hosannas.

blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth

If he could not see, he could hear, and he made good use of his hearing. If thou hast not every spiritual ability, yet, soul, dost thou use such ability as thou hast? Thou canst hear the gospel. Then search into the Word, and labor to understand it. Art thou doing that? Alas! men talk of what they cannot do, but they are not doing what they can.

He began to cry out, and say, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.

He had advanced much further than the mass of the people. To him it was not "Jesus of Nazareth," but it was "Jesus, thou Son of David."

48–50. *And many charged him that he should hold his peace:*

"Hush! Be quiet! Do not disturb him! Hear what an eloquent sermon he is delivering." Ay, but he thought of his poor blind eye, and of the only hope he now had before him of having them opened.

but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.

How soon they changed their note! The very persons that would have kept him back now help him on. Ah! when Christ speaks to his people, if they have been indifferent about the good of men, they also grow warm in heart, and they are ready to help and take interest in the case.

50. *And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.*

Blind as he was, he found his way to the Savior: I suppose the ear directed by the

voice helped him to do so.

51. *And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?*

Do you notice here a sort of gentle rebuke that the Savior gives to James and John? Read the 36th verse, and then read this again. “He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?” And now here is a blind beggar, and he sweetly puts the same question to him, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?”

The blind man said unto him,

And here he might well have shamed John and James. He asked for no thrones or kingdoms.

Lord, that I might receive my sight.

“Lord, that I might look up.” That was the word he used exactly; for no doubt he had been conscious that the light came from the sun as he felt its warmth upon him as he sat by the wayside; and, therefore, he thought that seeing must be looking up towards the place whence the sunlight came.

52. *And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole, And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.*

It is a very remarkable thing that you will not often find the Lord Jesus Christ granting a favor without ascribing it to some excellency in fate person to whom he grants it. It is generally “Great is thy faith,” or something of that sort—“I have not seen such faith.” Now this is a very remarkable thing, because we know there really was nothing whatever in the persons that they should deserve his great favor.

Mark 11

1-3. *And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him.*

The time was come for our Lord to finish his great work on earth, and his going up to Jerusalem was with this intent. He now determines to enter his capital city openly, and there to reveal himself as King. To this end, when he came near to the city, Jesus sent two disciples to bring him the foal of an ass whereon he should ride. His orders to the two disciples whom he come to Bethphage, are worthy of our serious attention. He directed them to the place where they should find the animal: “Go your way into the village over against you.” The Lord knows where that which he requires is to be found. Perhaps it is nearer to us than we dream: “over against you.” He told them that they would not have to search: “as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find.” When the Lord sends us on an errand, he will speed us on our way. He described the condition of the creature: “a colt tied, whereon never man sat.” Our Lord knows the position of every animal in the world, and he counts no circumstance to be beneath his office. Nor did he leave the disciples without orders how they were to proceed: “loose him, and bring him.” Demur and debate there would be none; they might act at once. To stand questioning is not for the messengers of our King: it is their duty to obey their Lord’s orders, and to fear nothing.

3. *And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither.*

The two animals would be willingly yielded up by their owner when the

disciples said, “The Lord hath need of them;” nay, he would not only give them up, but “straightway he will send him hither.” Either the owner was himself a secret disciple, or some awe of the Lord Jesus was on his mind; but he would right joyfully consent to lend the ass and its foal for the purpose for which they were required.

What a singular conjunction of words is here, “the Lord” and “hath need”! Jesus, without laying aside his sovereignty, had taken a nature full of needs; yet, being in need, he was still the Lord, and could command his subjects, and requisition their property. Whenever we have anything of which the Lord’s cause has need, how cheerfully should we hand it over to him! The owner of the colt regarded it as an honor to furnish Jesus with a creature to ride upon. How great is the power of Jesus over human minds, so that by a word he quietly moves them to do his bidding!

4-7. *And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him.*

This should be an accurate description of the conduct of all Christians: The disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them. They did not question or criticize their King’s commands; they obeyed them, which was much better. What a church should we see on earth if this were universally true! They carried out their King’s bidding in every detail.

The disciples also brought the the colt; in no way deviating from the orders which they had received. They added actions which naturally grew out of their King’s orders. There must be fit caparison for the steed which is to be employed for such a royal procession, so they put on him their clothes. This was done of their own accord. Many are ready to fetch other men’s asses, but slow to lend their own clothes; these disciples were willing and eager to bear their share in the triumphal procession of the Lord Jesus. From first to last there was no forced contribution or mercenary service; all was most voluntary: the colt was cheerfully lent, and the garments were spontaneously placed thereon. All was

simple and natural, full of truth and heartiness. How different from the artificial ceremonials of ordinary monarchs!

8. *And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way.*

The people were so numerous that they are described as a very great multitude. Unusual unanimity prevailed amongst the populace: they all gathered to Jesus. The patriarch Jacob had foretold, concerning the Shiloh, "unto him shall the gathering of the people be." This was fulfilled many times during the Savior's earthly ministry; and it is still continually being fulfilled.

The crowd was in a state of great excitement, and came marching along with Jesus in high enthusiasm. Carpeting the road, they spread, their garments in the way; and as if this were not enough, others cut down branches from the trees, and, strawed them in the way. Our first parents, in their shame, made clothes of the leaves of trees; but now both clothes and leaves are at the feet of man's Redeemer. John says that the people "took branches of palm-trees, and went forth to meet him." The long feathery fronds of the palms would be suitable either for waving in the air, or casting upon the ground before the King. The common people, in the simplest but most effective manner, prepared a royal welcome for the Son of David. What an unusual sight! They were on the tiptoe of expectation, looking for a kingly Deliverer, and they vaguely hoped that "Jesus the prophet of Nazareth" might prove to be the Promised One. He had excited their wonder, raised their hopes, and earned their reverence. For the time they held him in high honor. Do we wonder at it when we think how he had healed their sick, and had fed them by thousands when they fainted?

9, 10. *And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.*

Numbers still flocked together till there was not only a multitude, but multitudes, some that went before, and others that followed. The crowds preceding and following the Lord were of one mind concerning him, and, indeed, they seemed to have but one voice. Scarcely knowing what they did, probably dreaming of an

earthly kingdom, they lifted up one and the same loyal shout of “Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.” They quoted an ancient Psalm (118), and applied it to Jesus; and in every way expressed their delight and expectation. Alas! how soon this gleam of sunlight gave place to black darkness. The day of palms was closely followed by the day of crucifixion. Thus fickle are the sons of men. “Vox populi” is anything but “Vox Dei.”

11. *And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve.*

He desired quiet, and so he went out of the city. He loved the villages, and therefore he turned aside from the busy haunts of men, and entered into Bethany. In that place there lived a well-beloved family, always charmed to entertain him; and he lodged there. There he was at home, for he loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus. A day of excitement was followed by an evening of retirement in a country home. He spent the night of that most eventful day with his faithful friends. What a contrast between his entry into Jerusalem and his visit to his friends at Bethany! Lord, lodge with me! Make my house thine abode!

12. *And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:*

Wonderful words! The Lord of heaven hungered! We cannot imagine that his kind hosts had neglected to provide for him; probably he was so absorbed in thought that he forgot to eat bread. It may be that, according to his wont, in the morning, he had risen while all others in the house were still sleeping, that he might hold communion in private with his Father, and receive from heaven strength for the work that lay before him. At least, this was no unusual thing with him. He returned into the city; he shirked not the work which he had yet to do; but this time the King came hungering to his capital. He was about to begin a long day’s work without breaking his fast; yet his hand had fed thousands at one time. Surely all heaven and earth will be eager to wait upon his need.

13, 14. *And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply*

he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.

Looking for food, a fig tree in full leaf promised him a little refreshment. This fig tree was, apparently, no one's property; it stood in the way, it was growing in the public highway, all by itself. Its position was conspicuous. and its appearance striking, so that he saw it at once. It was not the time for figs; but the fig tree has this peculiarity, that the fruit comes before the leaves; if, therefore, we see leaves fully developed, we naturally look for figs fit to be eaten. This tree had put forth leaves out of season, when other fig trees were bare, and had not begun to put forth their early figs. It, so to speak, outran its fellows; but its premature growth was all deception. Our Lord, when he came to it, found nothing thereon, but leaves only. It had overleaped the needful first stage of putting forth green figs, and had rushed into a fruitless verdure. It was great at wood and leaf, but worthless for fruit. In this it sadly resembled Jerusalem, which was verdant with religious pretense, and forward with a vain enthusiasm; but it was destitute of repentance, faith, and holiness, which are far more important than pious formalities. The Lord Jesus used this green, but barren, and disappointing, tree as an object-lesson. He came to it as he came to the Jews; he found nothing but leaves; he condemned it to perpetual fruitlessness: "Let so fruit grow on thee henceforward forever;" and he left it under a sentence which was right speedily executed, even as Jerusalem would soon be destroyed.

15, 16. *And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; and would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple.*

Jesus went into the temple of God again, as he did at the beginning of his ministry. Then the reforming Prophet intimated what was needed, and now the King proceeds to carry it out. A temple dedicated to God must not become a place of merchandise and robbery. Jesus.. cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple. The sellers were the more permanently obstructive, the more

constantly offensive, so they were driven out first: but as there would have been no sellers if these had not been buyers, they must be cast out also. Those who kept the tables of the moneychangers might have pleaded that they were there for the public convenience, since they supplied shekels and other moneys of the sanctuary in lieu of Roman coin. The seats of them that sold doves seemed licensed, since they dealt in a young pigeons and turtle doves for the sacrifices. But these traders were not in this serving God, but making profit for themselves, and therefore our Lord overthrew all their arrangements, and cleared the holy place.

What an awe must have surrounded this one Man, that the whole tribe of traffickers should flee before him while the, endured the overturning of their tables and their seats! Neither the temple guard, nor the Roman soldiers appear to have interfered in any way. When Jesus takes to himself power, opposition ceases. What a prophecy this incident affords of the sense with which, in his Second Advent, he will purge his floor with the fan in his hand!

17. *And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

Our Lord, while he drives out the profaners of the temple, vindicates his holy violence by saying, “It is written.” Whether he was contending with the arch-enemy, or with wicked men, he used but one weapon, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” In this, as in everything else, let us follow his example. Isaiah had penned those words (Isaiah 56:7), “Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.” This prophecy had a special relation to the Court of the Gentiles, which was being so grossly desecrated by these dealers. Our Savior likened his :Father’s house, when occupied by these buyers and sellers, to those caves in the mountains where robbers were wont to lurk in his day: “Ye have made it a den of thieves.” The words spoken by the King were strong, but not more so than the case before him required. It is a king’s business to break up the hiding-places of bandits, and Jesus did so. He could not bear to see his Father’s house of prayer made into a haunt of robbers.

18. *And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was*

astonished at his doctrine.

Thus was fulfilled Psalm 2:2, “The rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed.”

19-21. *And when even was come, he went out of the city. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.*

This has been styled the one miracle of judgment wrought by our Lord; but surely that which is done to a tree cannot be called vindictive. To fell a whole forest has never been considered cruel, and to use a single barren tree as an object-lesson, can only seem unkind to those who are sentimental and idiotic. It was kindness to the ages to use a worthless tree to teach a salutary lessons.

22, 23. *And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.*

To the first disciples the power of absolutely working miracles was given by our Lord, and given in connection with a simple, unwavering confidence: “If ye have faith, and doubt not.” God may not work miracles for us, but he will do all that we need in accordance with our faith; doing it in a way of providence, according to the spirit of the present dispensation. But here also the faith that we exercise in him must be free from doubt.

Before a living faith, barren systems of religion will wither away; and by the power of undoubting confidence in God, mountains of difficulty shall be removed, and cast into the sea. Have we ever spoken in Christ’s name to barren fig trees and obstructing mountains, bidding them depart out of our way? If not, where is our faith? If we have faith and doubt not, we shall know the truth of this promise: it shall be done. Apart from the actual possession of unwavering faith, the words of our Lord will seem fabulous.

24. *Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.*

This gives us a grand cheque-book on the Bank of Faith, which we may use without stint. How wide are the terms! If we are enabled to pray the prayer of faith, we shall gain the blessing, be it whatever it may. This is not possible concerning things unpromised, or things not according to the divine will. Believing prayer is the shadow of the coming blessing. It is a gift from God, not a fancy of the human will, nor a freak of idle wishing.

25, 26. *And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.*

Note that our Lord according to Mark commenced this exhortation concerning forgiveness by saying, “Have faith in God”; then showed the power of faith in working wonders, and especially in obtaining answers to prayer, and last of all commanded forgiveness of trespasses. Was not that sentence “Have faith in God” the mother of their prayer “Increase our faith”? Jesus had said “Have faith,” and now when they fully understand what it is that he inculcates they take the word out of his mouth, and they say to their Lord, add to our faith. We trust we have some of that precious grace, but add to it yet more and more, we beseech thee.” Our Master in his teaching was continually connecting the forgiveness of others with the exercise of faith.

27, 28. *And they come again to Jerusalem: and as he was walking in the temple, there come to him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and say unto him, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority to do these things?*

Jesus returned to his Father’s house, and there he was again met by his old antagonists. When he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him; they had rallied their forces, and taken time to recall their courage. They interfered with him as he was teaching, and demanded

his authority for what he said and did. He had taken their breath away by his daring purgation of the temple, unarmed and unaided; and only after a night's interval dared they question his right to act as he had done. Now they put him to the question: "By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?" That he did marvelous things was admitted; but in what official capacity did he act, and who placed him in that office? This was carrying the war home: they struck out fiercely at their assailant. They hoped to wound him in this point, and to overcome him. Poor fools! They were not worthy of an answer from him.

29. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.*

Yes, Jesus answered. His answers are always complete, but seldom what his foes expect. The quibblers of our day need not be in too great a hurry to call their statements unanswerable: Jesus will answer for himself in due time. He says to these chief priests and elders, "I also will ask you one thing." Their question was met by another question, even as the rods of the Egyptian magicians, when turned into serpents, were met by Aaron's rod, which, as a serpent, swallowed up their rods. Frequently it will be wisdom not to reply to the quibblings of the enemies of the gospel, but to pose them with some mystery too deep for them.

Our Lord's conditions were fair and reasonable: "If ye tell me, I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things." Apparently, the questioners raised no objection, for Jesus at once stated his question to them.

30-33. *The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? answer me. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people: for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.*

The question our Lord put to the chief priests and elders was simple enough had

they been honest men; but as they had a game to play, they could not reply without great difficulty.

Men-pleasers are obliged to be politicians, and see which way the land lies. Our Lord put his questioners on the horns of a dilemma. If John the Baptist was sent from heaven, why had they rejected him? That John was of men, they dared not assert; for their fear of the people silenced them. They were in a corner, and saw no way of escape, and therefore they pleaded ignorance: They answered Jesus, and said, “We cannot tell.” Which answer was no answer from them, but supplied him with a just and crushing reply to them: “Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.” They could have told Jesus whence John’s baptism was, but they would not; and he could have told them all about his divine authority, but he knew that no useful end would be answered, and therefore he declined to stay more. It is a solemn thing when love itself grows weary, and refuses further conversation. Our Lord’s tone to these questioners is that of one who is dealing with hopeless creatures, who deserve no quarter, since they would make no use of leniency. They could not be won by gentleness; they must be shaken off exposed, and dethroned from the seat of power, before the eyes of those who had been misled by them.

Mark 12

1. *And he began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country.*

In this parable a certain man did all that could be done for his vineyard: it was well planted, and hedged round about, provided with a wine-press digged in the rock, and guarded by a tower built for the purpose. Even so the Jewish Church had been created, trained, guarded, and fully furnished by the Lord; “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant “(Isaiah 5:7). Everything was in good order for the production of fruit, so that the Lord was able to say, “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? “(Isaiah 5:4.)

The owner went into a far country and committed the estate to husbandmen who were to take care of it for him and yield to him a certain share of the produce as the rent. Thus the great Lord of Israel left the nation under the care of priests, and kings, and men of learning, who should have cultivated this heritage of Jehovah for him, and yielded up to him the fruit of this choice vineyard. God for a while seemed gone from his chosen people, for miracles had ceased; but this should have made the scribes and priests the more watchful, even as good servants are the more awake to guard the estate of their master when he is away.

2. *And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard.*

The owner waited till near the full time in which he could expect a return. The time of the fruit drew near; and as the husbandmen sent him none of the produce

of the vineyard, he sent his servants to receive the fruits of it, and bring them to him. These servants, as the lord's representatives, ought to have been received with due honor; but they were not. The leaders of the Jewish nation for a long time rendered to the Lord no homage, love, or service. Prophets were sent of God to Israel, but their message was refused by the rulers of the people.

3-5. *And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another; and him they killed, and many others; beating some, and killing some.*

The husbandmen, the persons in charge and authority, kings, priests, and teachers; these united in doing evil to the owner's servants. They were not themselves his "servants"; they deserved not so honorable a title. Beating, killing, and stoning, are put for various forms of maltreatment, which the Lord's prophets received at the hands of Israel's husbandmen, the religious rulers of the nation. Those to whom the vineyard was leased were traitors to the chief landlord, and did violence to his messengers; for in heart they desired to keep the vineyard to themselves.

The lord of the vineyard was patient, and gave them further opportunities to mend their ways: Again, he sent other servants. Failure to bring back the fruit was not the fault of the first messengers, for other servants were rejected even as they had been. The householder was very anxious to win the husbandmen to a better state of mind, for he increased the number of his representatives, sending more than the first, trusting that the evil men would yield to repeated calls. No good came of this effort of kindness; for the badly-disposed husbandmen only continued their murderous cruelty: they did unto them likewise. It was evidently a bad case. The Jewish people would not hearken to the voices of the Lord's servants, and their rulers not them the example of persecuting the men whom God had sent to them.

6. *Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.*

The sending of his son was the householder's last resort. Luke represents him as saying, "What shall I do?" He might have resolved at once to punish the evil-doers; but his action proved that mercy had triumphed over wrath: Last of all he sent unto them his son. The sending of Jesus to Jerusalem was God's ultimatum. If he should be rejected, judgment must fall upon the guilty, city. It seemed impossible that his mission could fail. In sending his beloved Son, the Father seemed to say, "Surely, 'they will reverence my son.' Can they go the length of doing despite to the Heir of all things? Will not his own beauty and majesty overawe them? Heaven adores him; hell trembles at him; surely, they will reverence my Son."

7. *But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.*

Things turned not out as a loving heart might have hoped. Evil worked itself to its consummation. When the husbandmen saw the son; that is to say, as soon as the chief priests and Pharisees perceived that the true Messiah was come, they said among themselves what they dared not say openly. The very sight of the heir of all things fired them with malice. In their hearts they hated Jesus, because they knew that he really was the Messiah. They feared that he would dismiss them, and assume possession of his own inheritance, and therefore they would make an end of him: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him." Once get him out of the way, they hoped to keep the nation in their own hands, and use it for their own purposes: therefore they inwardly said, "the inheritance shall be ours." They knew that he was the heir, and that it was his inheritance; but their knowledge did not prevent them from seeking to snatch the vineyard away from its rightful owner. Our Lord pictured to the life what was passing in the minds of the proud ecclesiastics around him, and he did not hesitate to do this to their faces. No names were mentioned, but this was personal preaching of the best kind.

8. *And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.*

The Lord Jesus becomes prophetic, as by the parable he foretells the success of their malice. The husbandmen were hasty in carrying out their wicked plot. No sooner said than done. Three acts were in that drama, and they followed quickly upon each other. We will drop the figures, and unveil the facts. They caught him in the garden of Gethsemane; they cast him out in their Council in the hall of

Caiaphas, and when he was led without the gate of Jerusalem; they slew him at Calvary; for theirs was the crime, though the :Romans did the deed. Thus the Heir was slain, but the murderers did not long retain the vineyard; swift justice overtook them.

9. *What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others.*

Jesus puts the matter before them. Out of their own mouths shall the verdict proceed. There is a time when the lord of the vineyard cometh. To those chief priests that hour was drawing very near: the question for them to think of was, "What will he do unto those husbandmen?" As a class, the religious leaders of the Jews were guilty of the blood of a long line of prophets, and they were about to crown their long career of crime by the murder of the Son of God himself: in the destruction of Jerusalem the God of heaven visited them, and dealt out just punishment to them. The siege of the city and the massacre of the inhabitants was a terrible avenging of the innocent blood which the people and their rulers had shed.

10, 11. *And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?*

Our Lord reminds them of David's language in Psalm 118:22, 23. They were professedly the builders, and they had rejected him who was the chief corner-stone. Yet the Lord God had made the despised one to be the head of the corner. He was the most conspicuous and honored stone in Israel's building. Against the will of scribe and priest this had been accomplished: for it was the Lord's doing. They might rage, but holy minds adored, and said, "It is marvelous in our eyes." The sufferings and glory of Christ are the wonder of the universe:" which things the angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:12). All that relates to him is marvelous in the eyes of his people.

12. *And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way.*

Christ's enemies could not injure him then, partly because the people heard him gladly, and were ready to protect him, but still more because the appointed time for his suffering and death had not fully come.

13. *And they sent unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians to catch him in his word.*

Our Lord's words, however, did not move them to repentance; but only increased their malice and hatred against him. Their hearts were hardened, and their consciences soared; so they took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. They would not acknowledge that Christ was the wisdom of God and the power of God; had they done so, they would not have attempted their impossible task. They, saw that, to ensnare Jesus in his talk, was a difficult undertaking; and therefore they "took counsel" how they might accomplish it. If he had been as faulty as we are, they might have succeeded; for men who wish to entrap us in our talk need not consult much about how to do it.

This incident teaches us that men who can be as precise and formal as these Pharisees were, can yet deliberately set themselves to entangle an opponent. Great outward religiousness may consist with the meanest spirit.

14, 15. *And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and caress for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth:*

They meant "to catch him in his words," if they could, so they baited their trap with flattery. Whenever a man begins to flatter you, be on your guard against him. If he tries to commence a conversation with you by uttering words of excessive admiration, depend upon it that he admires something that you have got more than he admires you; and, therefore, be on the watch against him. Our Savior must, in his heart, have utterly despised men who were so foolish as to imagine that they could entrap him by their flattering words. After that preface, they asked the questions which they thought would impale him upon the horns of a dilemma—

Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we

not give?

They knew very well that, if Christ said, “Do not give tribute to Caesar,” the Romans would have taken him up, and imprisoned him for preaching sedition, but, on the other hand, if he said, “Pay tribute to Caesar,” the Jews would have said that he was their enemy, and not a true patriot, or else he would not have admitted that the chosen people were bound to pay taxes to their Roman conquerors.

15–17. *But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me?*

Our great thought-rending King was not to be deceived either by their flattery or their crafty questioning. Malice and deceit designed his overthrow; but he saw through the cunning of his enemies, and perceived the wickedness that prompted them thus to assail him. Onlookers may not have perceived their wickedness, and our Lord’s disciples may have been puzzled as to how he would reply; but, as in all other trying circumstances, Jesus himself knew what he would do.

Wisely did he say to them, “Why tempt ye me? “It is as if he had said, “You see that I am not deceived by your false and flattering speeches, I can read the malice that is written in a our hearts, you are just powerless before me if I choose to treat you as I can do; what can poor, puny creatures, such as ye are, do against me? Why tempt ye me? “There is infinite scorn in our Savior’s question; yet there is an undertone of pity even for those who deserved it not: “Why tempt ye me? Have I given you any cause why you should seek to entrap me? Why are, you so foolish as to ask questions which must be to your own hurt?”

Whenever men pretend great reverence for Jesus, and then seek, by their erroneous teaching, or their science falsely so-called, to overthrow his gospel, they are base hypocrites.

bring me a penny, that I may see it.

Having exposed their folly and hypocrisy, Jesus proceeds to put them publicly to shame. He said to them, “Bring me a penny.” This request on his part, and their compliance with it, would make the whole matter more vivid and impressive to

the bystanders. When there is something to see and handle, a lesson becomes the more striking. Our Lord asked them to show him a specimen of the coin usually paid for the capitation tax: and they brought unto him a penny, a denarius. This coin represented the daily pay of a Roman soldier, and in the parable of the vineyard it was said to be the daily wage of the laborer. Had these men guessed the use to which Jesus would put the denarius, they would not have so quickly procured one for him. They bought their own confusion with that coin. They would never afterwards be able to look upon the tribute money without remembering how they were foiled in their attempt to entangle the hated Nazarene.

16. *And they brought it. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?*

He asked another question, that they might themselves assist in replying to themselves: He saith unto them, "Whose is this image and superscription? "Or rather, inscription. Before them were the image and inscription of the Roman emperor on the piece of money; but he would make them say as much, so he asks, "Whose is this?" The Jewish Rabbis taught that "if a king's coin is current in a country, the men of the country do thereby evidence that they acknowledge him for their lord."

When we are dealing with ungodly men, it is well if we can make them to be their own accusers.

And they said unto him, Caesar's.

They say unto him, "Caesar's", No other answer was possible. This tribute money was not a shekel of Jewish coinage, but money of the Roman empire. This was a plain proof that, whether they liked it or not, they were Roman subjects, and Caesar was their ruler. What then must follow but that they should pay to their acknowledged ruler his due?

17. *And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at him.*

Jesus did not say what was Caesar's; the coin itself settled the question of paying tribute. His reply covered all the duties of loyal subjects to the ruler under whose jurisdiction they lived; but this did not touch the sovereignty of God. Jehovah held rule over consciences and hearts; and they must see to it that, as Caesar had his own, the Lord had his own also. Render therefore "to God the things that are God's." This was not an evasive reply on Christ's part; it was full of meaning, and very much to the point; and yet it was so put that neither Pharisees nor Herodians could make anything out of it for party purposes, or for their wretched design of entangling Jesus in his talk. Neither of the two sects turned a penny by their penny.

To us the lesson of this incident is, that the State has its sphere, and we must discharge our duties to it; but we must not forget that God has his throne, and we must not allow the earth-kingdom to make us traitors to the heaven-kingdom. Caesar must keep, his place and by no means go beyond it; but God must have the spiritual dominion to himself alone.

18. *Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying,*

There was no rest for Jesus; as soon as one set of enemies was driven away, another company marched up to attack him. He had silenced the Pharisees and the Herodians; now there came to him the Sadducees, the broad churchmen, the rationalists of our Savior's day: which say that there is no resurrection. They rejected a great deal more of the teaching of the Scriptures than this one point of the resurrection; but this is specially mentioned here as it was the subject on which they hoped to entrap or confuse the Savior. The Sadducees "say that there is no resurrection"; yet they came to Christ to ask what would happen, in a certain contingency, "in the resurrection." They evidently thought that they could state a case which would bring into contempt the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. They might have taken warning from the experience of the Pharisees and the Herodians; but doubtless they felt so sure of their own position that they expected to succeed though the others had so conspicuously failed.

19. *Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.*

“Master;” they came with affected respect for the great “Teacher.” They were as polite as the previous company of assailants; but, like them, though the words of their mouth were smoother than butter, war was in their heart: though their words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords (Psalm 55:21).

“Moses wrote”: they gave the substance, though not the exact words recorded in Deuteronomy 25:5. The law of Moses, in this as in many other shatters, recognized existing customs, and imposed certain regulations upon them. For a man to die without leaving a child to bear his name, and enter upon his inheritance, was regarded as so great a calamity that the Jews judged that every possible means must be taken to prevent it. The practice here described prevails among various Oriental nations even to this day.

20 -23. *Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise. And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.*

These Sadducees may have known such a case as they stated, though it is extremely unlikely; more probably, this was one of the stock stories they were in the habit of telling in order to cast ridicule upon the resurrection. They had no belief in spiritual beings; therefore, they supposed that, if there were a future state, it would be similar to the present. Having stated their case, they put to the Savior this perplexing question: “In the resurrection whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.” They doubtless thought that this question would puzzle Christ, as it had puzzled others to whom it had been put; but he had no more difficulty in answering this than he had with the previous enquiries.

24. *And Jesus, answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?*

The error was not with him, but with them. Their supposed argument was based on their own erroneous notions about the unseen world; and when the light of God’s Word was poured upon their seven men of straw, they vanished into thin

air. The answer to objectors, skeptics, infidels today, may be given in our Lord's words: "Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?" These Sadducees thought that they had found a difficulty in the Scriptures; but their error arose from their not knowing the Scriptures. This is the root of almost all error, ignorance of the Inspired Word of God. These men were acquainted with the letter, but they did not really know the Scriptures, or they would have found there abundant revelations concerning the resurrection.

Their error arose, also, from ignorance of "the power of God." The resurrection of the dead is one of the greatest proofs of the power of God, with whom all things are possible. These Sadducees limited the Holy One of Israel in their ignorance or denial of his power. What is there about the resurrection that is incredible to the man who knows "the power of God"? Surely, he, who created all things by the word of his power, can, by that same power, raise the dead in his own appointed time.

25. *For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.*

"In the resurrection" our Lord implied that there is a resurrection; he did not even stay to prove that truth, but went on to speak of the resurrection life as being of a higher order than our present natural life: "they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in hearer." Our Savior's answer struck at another Sadducean error; his questioners did not believe in angels. Jesus did not attempt to prove the existence of angels; but took that fact also for granted, by saying that, "in the resurrection "men" are as the angels of God in heaven." He did not say that they are changed into angels; but, as Luke records his words, "they are equal unto the angels." They are spiritual beings, as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15.

26, 27. *And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses,*

Our Savior now gives these Sadducees further instruction "as touching the dead." He used the formula he so often employed in speaking to those who professed to read the Scriptures: "Have ye not read?" You reject the oral traditions which the Pharisees accept and teach in place of the commandments of

God, have you not read that which was spoken unto you by God?" Jesus always manifested the utmost reverence for the revealed Word of God. He here showed that the truth made known in the Scriptures is a very personal matter This message was spoken unto these Sadducees, although they knew it not; it was spoken by God, yet they received it not.

How necessary it is that we should search the scriptures, lest there should be divinely-revealed truths that so have not even read! How needful, also, is the teaching of the Holy Spirit, lest we should read, as these Sadducees did, and yet not know the Scriptures!

how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living; ye therefore do greatly err.

Jesus might have referred to many passages in the Old Testament about the resurrection; but as the Sadducees regarded the Pentateuch with special honor, he quoted what Moses had recorded in Exodus 3:6: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;" and then added his own comment and exposition: "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had long been dead when the Lord spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. His words implied that the patriarchs were still living. His covenant was made with those who still existed.

There is much teaching in this truth, that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Some suppose that, until the resurrection, the saints are virtually non-existent; but this cannot a be. Though disembodied, they still live; Jesus does not argue about it, but he states the fact as beyond all question. The living God is the God of diving men; and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive, and identified as the same persons who lived on the earth. God is the God of Abraham's body as well as of his soul, for the covenant seal was set upon his flesh. The grave cannot hold any portion of the covenanted ones; God is the God of our entire being, spirit, soul, and body.

28. *And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him,*

This man was one of those constantly engaged in copying the Law, and also one who explained its meaning to the people. He was a gentleman “learned in the Law.” Probably he was a man of clearer light and greater discernment than his associates. Mark says that he had heard our Lord’s words to the Sadducees, “and perceiving that he had answered them well,” he put his own question to Jesus. He was evidently a man of candor, possessing a considerable amount of spiritual knowledge. This may help to explain the reason for his question:—

Which is the first commandment of all?

According to the Rabbis, there were many commandments which were secondary, and others which were of the first importance. They often put commands, which really were comparatively small, on a par with those which were greatest. One of them even ventured to say that the commands of the Rabbis were more important than the commands of the Law, because the commands of the Law were little and great, but all the commands of the Rabbis were great. Some of them regarded eating with unwashen hands as being as great a crime as murder; and they would classify the rubbing of ears of corn together on the Sabbath-day with adultery; so that they caused great confusion as to the real order of moral precepts. It was, therefore, most desirable to get from this wise Teacher, whom the scribe addressed as “Master”, an authoritative answer to the question, “Which is the first commandment of all?” The enquiry was one which would be sure to entangle the Savior if he did not answer it wisely; and therein the lawyer tempted, tested, tried, and proved him.

Blessed be his dear name, he can stand any test to which he may be put! Satan tempted, tested, and tried him to the uttermost of his power; but even he never found any flaw, or fault, or failing in him.

29. *And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:*

These were very familiar words to our Lord’s hearers, for all devout Jews were in the habit of repeating them every morning and evening. Deuteronomy 6:4-9, from which our Savior quoted, was one of the four passages which were worn as “phylacteries” (23:5).

30. *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,*

Because he is our God, Jehovah claims our heart's love. As our Creator, Preserver, Provider, and Judge, he commands us to yield to him all our heart's affection; to love him first, best, heartiest; out of all comparison to the love we have to any fellow-creature, or to ourselves.

and with all thy soul,

We are to love God with all our life, to love him more than our life; so that, if necessary, we would give up our life rather than give up our love to God.

and with all thy mind,

We are to love God with our intellect, with all the powers of our mind, bringing memory, thought, imagination, reason, judgment, and all our mental powers, as willing subjects to bow at God's feet in adoration and love.

and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

It is "first" in point of time, for it was binding upon the angels before man was created; it was binding upon Adam from the hour of his creation in the image of God. It is "first" in importance, for there is no love to a creature worthy of comparison with love to the Creator.

Who can render to God this perfect love? None of our fallen race. Salvation by the words of the Law is clearly an impossibility, for we cannot obey even the first commandment. There is One who has obeyed it, and the obedience of Christ is reckoned as, the obedience of all who trust him. Being free from legal condemnation, they seek ever after to obey this "great and first commandment" (R.V.) by the power of the Holy! Spirit, who dwells within them.

31. *And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*

The answer is wider than the question. The lawyer asked about “the great commandment”; Christ answered his enquiry, and then added, “and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Who of us has really loved his neighbor as himself? Under the Gospel this commandment is certainly not less binding than under the law.

32, 33. *And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth:*

Our Lord Jesus Christ has an almighty power over men’s minds; he possesses irresistible charms by which he turns adversaries into advocates. He has a secret key which fits the wards of human hearts, and he can open that which seems to be the most securely closed against him. “Never man spake like this man,” for in his voice, even in his humiliation, there were traces of the eternal fiat which of old spake the primeval midnight into noon.

for there is one God; and there is none other but he: and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

To be ignorant of the law of God is to be far off from the kingdom; and to be ignorant of the gospel is also to be in a measure far off from the kingdom: but this man knew the law, and knew it well. He had a spiritual appreciation of its range, meaning, and spirituality. Notice how he puts it: he puts it well.

He says, “To love God with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength—this is the first commandment.” Here we see, first, that he mentions sincere love, in the words “to love him with all the heart.” God is to be loved, not in name, not with lip language, not with mere pretense, but with the heart. God requireth by his law the hearty obedience of his creatures. Next, the scribe puts it, “With all thy understanding”; that is, God deserves and demands the intelligent love of his creatures. He does not ask blind love of them: he desires them to know something of him, and of his works, and of his claims upon them, so as to love him because he deserves their affection. The understanding must justify and impel the affections. Then, he puts it, “with all thy soul”; that is, with the emotional nature. Love God with feeling—not

coolly, but with the whole force of your feeling. Love him with your soul, for soul love is the soul of love. And then he adds, “and with all thy strength”; that is to say, intensity is to be thrown into our love to God. We are to serve him with our might, and throw all our whole energy into his worship. Thus he gives us, under four heads, a description of the kind of love which the law of God requires of us—sincere—“with all thy heart”; intelligent—“with all thy understanding”; emotional—“with all thy soul”; intense and energetic—“with all thy strength.” This the scribe knew, and it was most valuable knowledge.

34. *And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.*

When we meet with a man of that kind, and see him hearing the gospel, we may say of him, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.” These are the kind of people who feel the force of truth, and are converted to the faith of Jesus, these straightforward people, these hearty lovers of that which is good. The Savior called some men, “honest and good ground,” and they were such even before the seed of the word fell upon them. Of course, even this natural openness and sincerity of character is God’s gift, but assuredly these are the people upon whom the heavenly work takes most effect.

And no man after that durst ask him any question.

He had so decidedly put all his questioners to the rout that no other man had the audacity to court defeat at his hands. The infallible wisdom of Christ had put all his accusers and tempters to flight.

35, 36. *And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son?*

These questions of our Lord themselves contain the answers to the present-day critics who deny the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and the Davidic

authorship and Messianic application of certain Psalms. He saith unto them, “How then doth David in spirit call him Lord?” quoting from Psalm 110:1, “saying, The LORD said unto My Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool,” our Savior declared that these were the words of David, speaking “by the Holy Ghost” (see Mark 12:36), concerning the Christ, the Messiah. This ought for ever to settle the question about the inspiration, authorship, and application of that Psalm at least. “The LORD said unto my Lord,” — Jehovah said unto my Adonai: David, by the Holy Ghost; learned what the Father said unto the Son; and thus he was brought into connection with the whole sacred Trinity. “Sit thou on my right hand”: the Messiah was bidden to rest after his great mediatorial work was accomplished, and to sit on his Father’s right hand, in the place of honor, power, and majesty. “Till I make thine enemies thy footstool”: Jesus is to keep his seat till his foes are all prostrate at his feet.

This was the problem the Pharisees had to solve: if the Messiah was David’s Son, how was it that David, by the Holy Ghost, called him his Lord? The Christ must be something more than mere man; otherwise the Psalmist’s words would have been unsuitable, and even blasphemous. He was higher than the angels, for unto none of them did Jehovah ever stay, “Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool “(Hebrews 1:13).

37–40. *And the common people heard him gladly. And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribe, which love to so in long clothing, and love salutations in the market-place, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: which devour widows’ houses, and for a presence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.*

We often hear foolish people say “You must always preach in love, and not say anything against anybody; Jesus did not denounce anybody.” Oh, dear! then what about this denunciation of the scribes? Were Jesus here today, he would not be the molluscus creature that some people want us to be. He had a backbone, and a conscience, and a very heavy right hand, and he brought that hand down, like a sledge-hammer, upon cant and hypocrisy and error, and if we would be like Christ, we must be manly, and bold, and outspoken. They tell us this in order that we may easily glide through the world, and that all men may speak well of us. But so did their fathers to the false prophets; and do you suppose that

we who preach God's Word, are going to keep back any part of our testimony because it will bring us into ill repute with the ungodly? God forbid! We live for something higher and nobler than being fed upon the breath of evil men. If there be error in high places, if there be vice anywhere, it is the duty of the minister of Christ, in his Master's name, to attack it with all his might. Here we find our Lord and Master plainly declaring that the scribes, the great masters of the law, were a set of pretentious hypocrites who robbed even the widow and the fatherless, and who would, in due time, "receive greater damnation." Even so must the truth still be spoken, whoever may be offended by it.

41-44. *And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow*

Doubly poor, because she was not only a widow, but in poverty: "a certain poor widow,"—

and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance;

Christ measures what we really give by what we have left—by the proportion which what we give bears to what we possess:

but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

So she gave more than any or all the others did.

Mark 13

1, 2. *And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

Jesus went out of the temple. His ministry there was ended. As his disciples moved away with him towards the Mount of Olives, they called his attention to the great stones of which the temple was constructed, and the costly adornments of the beautiful building. To them the appearance was glorious; but to their Lord it was a sad sight. His Father's house, which ought to have been a house of prayer for all nations, had became a den of thieves, and soon would be utterly destroyed: Jesus said unto them, "Seest thou these great buildings? there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Josephus tells us that Titus at first tried to save the temple, even after it was set on fire, but his efforts were of no avail; and at last he gave orders that the whole city and temple should be levelled, except a small portion reserved for the garrison. This was so thoroughly done that the historian says that "there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited."

We sometimes delight in the temporal prosperity of the Church as if it were something that must certainly endure; but all that is external will pass away or be destroyed. Let us only reckon that to be substantial which comes from God, and is God's work. "The things which are seen are temporal"

3, 4. *And as he sat upon the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these*

things shall be fulfilled?

The little procession continued ascending the mount of Olives until Jesus reached a resting-place from which he could see the temple (Mark 3:3). There he sat down, and the disciples came unto him privately, saying, “Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled?” These are the questions that have been asked in every age since our Savior’s day.

5, 6. *And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you: For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*

Jesus was always practical. The most important thing for his disciples was not that they might know when “these things” would be, but that they might be preserved from the peculiar evils of the time. Therefore, Jesus answered and said unto them, “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” They were to beware lest any of the pretended Messiahs should lead them astray, as they would pervert many others. A large number of impostors came forward before the destruction of Jerusalem, giving out that they were the anointed of God; almost every page of history is blotted with the names of such deceivers; and in our own day we have seen some come in Christ’s name, saying that they are Christs. Such men seduce many; but they who heed their Lord’s warning will not be deluded by them.

7. *And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars,*

Our Savior’s words might be applied to almost any period of the world’s history. Earth has seldom had a long spell of quiet; there have almost always been both the realities of war, and the rumors of war. There were many such ever Jerusalem was overthrown; there have been many such ever since; and there will be many such until that glorious period when “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

be ye not troubled: for such things must needs be; but the end shall

not be yet.

“Be ye not troubled:” is a timely message for the disciples of Christ in every age. “For all these things must come to pass,” therefore let us not be surprised or alarmed at them; “but the end is not yet.” The destruction of Jerusalem was the beginning of the end, the great type and anticipation of all that will take place when Christ shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. It was an end; but not the end: “the end is not yet.”

8. *For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows.*

One would think that there was sorrow enough in earthquakes and famines and troubles; but our Lord said that these were only “the beginning of sorrows”, the first birth-pangs of the travail that must precede his coming, either to Jerusalem, or to the whole world. This prophecy ought both to warn the disciples of Christ what they may expect, and wean them from the world where all these and greater sorrows are to be experienced.

9. *But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten: and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them.*

Our Lord not only foretold the general trial that would come upon the Jews, and upon the world; but also the special persecution which would be the portion of his chosen followers. The New Testament gives abundant proof of the fulfilment of these words. Even in Paul’s day, “this sect” was“everywhere spoken against.” Since then, has there been any land unstained by the blood of the martyrs? Wherever Christ’s gospel has been preached, men have risen up in arms against the messengers of mercy, and afflicted and killed them wherever they could.

10. *And the gospel must first be published among all nations.*

The world is to the Church like a scaffold to a building. When the Church is built, the scaffold will be taken down; the world must remain until the last elect one is saved. Before Jerusalem was destroyed, the gospel was probably "published among all nations" so far as it was then known; but there is to be a fuller proclamation of it "for a witness unto all nations" before the great consummation of all things: then shall the end come, and the King shall sit upon the throne of his glory, and decide the eternal destiny of the whole human race.

11. *But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye:*

When you are before the judge, or about to be there, do not worry yourself about "what ye shall speak." Be not anxious as to your manner or matter when on your defense. If you are the Lord's true servant, you are the spokesman of the Holy Spirit; he will work in, you a peaceful frame of mind, and fit words "shall be given you." He will speak in you and through you. The Father himself will put into your mouth, at the moment, the fittest reply to your adversaries. This has been wonderfully true in former ages in the cases of martyrs for the truth's sake; and bold defenders of the faith still receive the same kind of guidance. Simple peasants have groveled great philosophers, and humble women have put learned ecclesiastics to a nonplus.

for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.

All along, men of God are simply instruments for God. Our Lord Jesus claimed to speak, not of himself, but from the Father; and to this he conforms his faithful witnesses. They speak and yet they speak not: God is silent and yet he speaks by them.

12. *Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.*

Unnatural hatreds have sprung out of religious bitterness. The old serpent not only endeavors to poison the relationship of the creature to the Creator, but even

that of child to parent, and parent to child. Brothers can become unbrotherly, and all other relations unnatural, when under the dominion of religious bigotry. In times of persecution we may not expect love to ourselves from those who love not God. It might have seemed impossible that blood relations should be willing to assist in compassing the death of each other; but history has abundantly shown that our Lord's words were none too strong. He knew the hearts of men, and forewarned his disciples of the pitiless tempest which would beat upon in consequence of human enmity to the truth.

13. *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.*

These are heavy words, but true. If we are faithful we shall of necessity make enemies. Jesus as good as says—The classes and the masses will turn against you because of the name, the doctrine, and the rule of your Master. Sometimes the monarch, and sometimes the mob will rage against you; but either from one or other, or both, shall the opposition arise. "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" was the storm-signal by which successive persecutions were announced. That signal may again be displayed in the order of divine providence. Happy are they who can bear persecution, and hold on and hold out even "to the end" of the trial—the close of life, or the termination of the dispensation. Such "shall be saved" indeed; but those who can be overcome by opposition are lost.

14. *But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not, (let him that readeth understand,) then let them that be in Judaea flee to the mountains:*

This portion of our Savior's words appears to relate solely to the destruction of Jerusalem. As soon as Christ's disciples saw "the abomination of desolation ", that is, the Roman ensigns, with their idolatrous emblems, stand in the holy place, they knew that the time for them to escape had arrived; and they did "flee to the mountains."

The Christians in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and villages, "in Judea", availed themselves of the first opportunity for eluding the Roman armies, and fled to the mountain city of Pella, in Perea, where they were preserved from the

general destruction which overthrew the Jews.

15, 16. *And let him that is on the housetop not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house: And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment.*

There was no time to spare before the final investment of the guilty city; the man "on the house-top" could "not come down to take anything out of his house", and the man "in the field" could not "return back, to take his clothes." They must flee to the mountains in the greatest haste the moment that they saw "Jerusalem compassed with armies "(Luke 21:20).

17. *But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!*

It must have been a peculiarly trying time for the women who had to flee from their homes just when they needed quiet and rest. How thoughtful and tender was our pitiful Savior in thus sympathizing with suffering mothers in their hour of need!

18. *And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter.*

"Flight... in the winter" would have been attended with special difficulties; so the disciples were exhorted to "pray" that some other time might be available. The Lord knew exactly when they would be able to escape, yet he bade them pray that their flight might not be in the winter. The wise men of the present day would have said that prayer was useless under such conditions; not so the great Teacher and Example of his praying people; he taught that such a season was the very time for special supplication.

19. *For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be.*

Read the record written by Josephus of the destruction of Jerusalem, and see

how truly our Lord's words were fulfilled. The Jews impiously said, concerning the death of Christ, "His blood be on us, and on our children." Never did any other people invoke such an awful curse upon themselves, and upon no other nation did such a judgment ever fall. We read of Jews crucified till there was no more wood for making crosses; of thousands of the people slaying one another in their fierce faction fights within the city; of so many of them being sold for slaves that they became a drug in the market, and all but valueless; and of the fearful carnage when the Romans at length entered the doomed capital; and the blood-curdling story exactly bears out the Savior's statement uttered nearly forty years before the terrible events occurred.

20. *And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved:*

These were the words of the King as well as of the Prophet; and as such, they were both authentic and authoritative. Jesus spoke of what "should be" not only as the Seer who was able to gaze into the future, but as the Sovereign Disposer of all events. He knew what a fiery trial awaited the unbelieving nation, and that "except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved." If the horrors of the siege were to continue long, the whole race of the Jews would be destroyed.

but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.

The King had the power to cut short the evil days, and he explained his reason for using that power: "For the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days" Those who had been hated and persecuted by their own countrymen became the means of preserving them from absolute annihilation. Thus has it often been since those days; and for the sake of his elect the Lord has withheld many judgments, and shortened others. The ungodly owe to the godly more than they know, or would care to own.

21, 22. *And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there; believe him not: For false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible,*

even the elect.

It is a grand thing to have such faith in Christ that, you have none to spare for impostors. It is important not to distribute your faith too widely. Those who believe a little of everything will, in the end, believe nothing of anything. If you exercise full faith in that which is sure and steadfast, “false Christs and false prophets” will not be able to make you their dupes. In one respect, the modern teachers of heresy are more successful than their Judeean prototypes, for they do actually “deceive the very elect”, even though they cannot “shew signs and wonders.” One of the saddest signs of the times in which we live is the ease with which “the very elect” are deceived by the smooth-tongued “false Christs and false prophets” who abound in our midst.

23. *But take ye heed: behold, I have foretold you all things.*

Yet our Savior expressly forewarned his followers against them: “Behold, I have foretold you all things.” Forewarned is forearmed. Let it be so in our case. Our Savior’s expressive command may be fitly applied to the whole system of “modern thought” which is contrary to the inspired Word of God: “Believe it not.”

24-26. *But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.*

Our Lord appears to have purposely mingled the prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and his own second coming, so that there should be nothing in his words to satisfy idle curiosity, but everything to keep his disciples always on the watch for his appearing. These verses must apply to the coming of the King at the last great day. There may have been a partial fulfilment of them in “the tribulation” that came upon his guilty capital; and the language of the Savior might have been taken, metaphorically, to set forth the wonders in the heavens and the woes on the earth in connection with that awful judgment; but we must regard Christ’s words here as prophetic of the final manifestation of

“the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.” There will be no further need of “the sun and the moon and the star,” when he, who is brighter than the sun, shines forth in all the glory of his Father and of his holy angels.

27. *And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.*

Our Lord’s first concern, when he comes again, will be the security of “his elect.” He has gone to prepare a place for them; and when the place is ready, and the time for their glorification has come.

28, 29. *Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near: So ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors.*

Our Lord here evidently returns to often made use of its illuminated the subject of the destruction of Jerusalem, and in these words gives his apostles warning concerning the signs of the times. He had recently used the barren fig tree as an object-lesson; he now bids his disciples “learn a parable of the fig tree” and all the trees (Luke 21:31). God’s great book of nature is full of illustrations for those who have eyes to perceive them; and the Lord Jesus, the great Creator, often made use of its illuminated pages in conveying instruction to the minds of his hearers. On this occasion, he used a simple simile from the parable of the fig-tree: “When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh.” They could not mistake so plain a token of the near return of summer; and Jesus would have them read quite as quickly the signs that were to herald the coming judgment on Jerusalem: “So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.” The Revised Version has the words, “Know ye that he is nigh,” the Son of man, the King. His own nation rejected him when he came in mercy; so his next coming would be a time of terrible judgment and retribution to his guilty capital. Oh, that Jews and Gentiles today were wise enough to learn the lesson of that fiery trial, and to seek his face, those wrath they cannot bear!

30. *Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done.*

The King left his followers in no doubt as to when these things should happen. It was just about the ordinary limit of a generation when the Roman armies compassed Jerusalem, whose measure of iniquity was then full, and overflowed in misery, agony, distress, and bloodshed such as the world never saw before or since. Jesus was a true Prophet; everything that he foretold was literally fulfilled.

31. *Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.*

He confirmed what he had already said, and what he was about to say, by a solemn affirmation: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” “The Word of the Lord endureth for ever,” and though that Lord appeared in fashion as a man, and was shortly to be crucified as a malefactor, his words would endure when heaven and earth would have fulfilled the purpose for which he had created them, and passed away. Christ’s promises of pardon are as sure of fulfilment as his prophecies of punishment; no word of his shall ever “pass away.”

32. *But of that day and that hour knoweth no man,*

There is a manifest change in our Lord’s words here, which clearly indicates that they refer to his last great coming to judgment: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man.” Some would be prophets have wrested this verse from its evident meaning by saying, “Though we do not know the day and the hour of Christ’s coming, we may know the year, the month, and even the week.” If this method of renting the words of Jesus is not blasphemous, it is certainly foolish, and betrays disloyalty to the King.

no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

He added that, not only does no man know of that day and hour, but it is hidden

from angelic beings also: “No, not the angels which are in heaven,.” We need not therefore be troubled by idle prophecies of hair-brained fanatics, even if they claim to interpret the Scriptures; for what the angels do not know has not been revealed to them. Even Christ, in his human nature, so voluntarily limited his own capacities that he knew not the time of his Second Advent. It is enough for us to know that he will surely come; our great concern should be to be ready for his appearing whenever he shall return.

33-37. *Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.*

Our Lord again enjoins upon his followers the duty of watchfulness, and repeats, in a slightly-altered form, the reason previously given: “For ye know not when the time is.” It is idle to say that we may find out the year, if not the day and hour, of Christ’s coming. The time of the end is hidden, and shall not be known until suddenly he shall appear “in the clouds in power and great glory.” It should be our one great concern to be sure that we shall be ready to meet him whenever he may come.

Mark 14

1, 2. *After two days was the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread: and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put him to death. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people.*

Now, note this. It must be on the feast day, and it shall be on the feast day; yet they said, “not on the feast day.” But what does it matter what they say? Do you not observe how they were checkmated all round, how their purpose was like the whistling wind, and the eternal purpose stood firm in every particular?

3. *And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,*

A well-known person. There were plenty of Simons, and so they had to put another name to distinguish him. You remember Simon the Pharisee, in whose house Christ was anointed by a woman, who washed his feet with tears. This is another Simon. Not Simon the Pharisee, but Simon the Leper.

A healed man, no doubt, or he could not have entertained guests. There can be no question by whom he was healed; for there was nobody else that could heal leprosy, except our Divine Lord. “And being at Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper.”

as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.

The beauty of this woman’s act consisted in this, that it was all for Christ. All who wore in the house could perceive and enjoy the perfume of the precious

ointment; but the anointing was for Jesus only. The liquid nard flowed over his locks, and, as it was with Aaron, it went, doubtless, down his beard to the utmost skirts of his garments.

4. *And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?*

Matthew says that they were disciples. Shame upon them. The ointment was put to its proper use. It was more wasted when it was in the box than when it was out of it, for it was doing nothing inside the alabaster box. But when it came out, it was answering its purpose. It was perfuming all round about. “Why was this waste of the ointment made?”

When lives are lost in Christ’s honor, or strength is spent in his service there is no waste. It is what life and strength are made for—that they may be spent for him.

5. *For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.*

According to John’s account, it was Judas who asked, “Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? “The same evangelist gives the reason for the traitor’s question, “This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.” The complaint having been started by Judas, others of the disciples joined in it. If this devoted and enthusiastic woman had waited for the advice of these prudent people, she would neither have sold the ointment, nor poured it out. She did well to take counsel with her own loving heart, and then to pour the precious nard upon that dear head which was so soon to be crowned with thorns. She thus showed that there was, at least, one heart in the world that thought nothing was too good for her Lord! and that the best of the best ought to be given to him. May she have many imitators in every age until Jesus comes again!

6. *And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she has wrought a good work on me.*

She had been very happy in the act; probably it was the happiest hour in all her life when she gave this costly gift to the Lord she loved so well. But a cloud passed over her bright face as the whispered complaints reached her ear. Jesus perceived that the murmuring of the disciples troubled the woman, so he rebuked them, and commended her: “Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work on me.” She did something we cannot do, for Christ is not now here in person, to be anointed by those who love him as this woman did. We can perform good works upon others for his sake; and he will accept them as though they were done unto himself.

7. *For ye have the poor with you always,*

If you help them one day, they are poor, and they want helping the next. Or if you help them and leave them, leaving them because they go home to God, there are other poor people sure to come, for they will never cease out of the land. “Ye have the poor with you always.”

And whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.

“Ye can only do this for me during the few days that I shall be with you. Within a week I shall be crucified. Forty more days I shall be gone from you. Me ye have not always.”

8. *She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.*

She probably did not know all that her action meant when she anointed her Lord for his burial. The consequences of the simplest action done for Christ may be much greater than we think. Go thou, my sister, and do what God bids thee; and it shall be seen that thou hast done far more than thou knowest. Obey the holy impulse within thy spirit, my brother; and thou mayest do ten thousand I times more than thou hast ever I imagined to be possible.

9. *Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached*

throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

This woman's outburst of affection, this simple-hearted act of love to Christ himself, is one of those things which are to live as long as the gospel lives. The aroma of this loving deed is to abide as long as the world itself endures.

10, 11. *And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them. And when they heard it, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him.*

What a contrast to the incident we have just been considering! The anointing of Jesus is to be the theme of admiration wherever the gospel is preached; but his betrayal by Judas will be a subject for execration to all eternity. It was one of the twelve, who went unto the chief priests, to bargain for the price of his Lord's betrayal. He did not even mention Christ's name in his infamous question, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?", "The amount agreed upon, thirty pieces of silver, was the price of a slave; and showed how little value the chief priests set upon Jesus, and also revealed the greed of Judas in selling his master for so small a sum. Yet many have sold Jesus for a less price than Judas received; a smile or a sneer has been sufficient to induce them to betray their Lord.

Let us, who have been redeemed with Christ's precious blood, set high store by him, think much of him, and praise him much. As we remember, with shame and sorrow, these thirty pieces of silver, let us never undervalue him, or forget the priceless preciousness of him who was reckoned as worth no more than a slave.

12-15. *And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover? And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The*

Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us.

How truly royal was Jesus of Nazareth even in his humiliation! He had no home of his own wherein he could “Keep the passover “with his disciples; he was soon to be put to a public and shameful death; yet he had only to send two of his disciples “into the city to such a man”, and the guest - chamber, furnished and prepared, was at once placed at his disposal. He did not take the room by arbitrary force, as an earthly monarch might have done; but he obtained it by the diviner compulsion of almighty love. Even in his lowest estate, our Lord Jesus had the hearts of all men beneath his control. What power he has now that he reigns in glory!

16. *And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.*

If Christ’s disciples always loyally did as Jesus appointed them, they would always speed well on his errands. There are many more people in the world ready to yield to Christ than some of us think. If we would only go to them as Peter and John went to this man in Jerusalem, and say to them what “the Master saith”, we should find that their hearts would be opened to receive Christ even as this man’s house was willingly yielded up at our Lord’s request.

17, 18. *And in the evening he cometh with the twelve. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.*

Our Lord remained in seclusion until the evening, and then went to the appointed place, and reclined at the paschal table with the twelve. And as they sat and did eat, he said, “Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.” This was a most unpleasant thought to bring to a feast, yet it was most appropriate to the passover, for God’s commandment to Moses concerning the first paschal lamb was, “With bitter herbs they shall eat it.” This was a painful reflection for our Lord, and also for his twelve chosen companions: “One of you”, and his eyes would glance round the table as he said it, “One of you

shall betray me."

19. *And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I?*

That short sentence fell like a bombshell among the Savior's body-guard. It startled them; they had all made great professions of affection for him, and, for the most part, those professions were true. And they were exceeding sorrowful: and well they might be. Such a revelation was enough to produce the deepest emotions of sorrow and sadness. It is a beautiful trait in the character of the disciples that they did not suspect one another, but every one of them enquired, almost incredulously, as the form of the question implies, "Lord, is it I?" No one said, "Lord, is it Judas?" Perhaps no one of the eleven thought that Judas was base enough to betray the Lord who had given him an honorable place among his apostles.

We cannot do any good by suspecting our brethren; but we may do great service by suspecting, ourselves. Self-suspicion is near akin to humility.

20. *And he answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish.*

A man may get very near to Christ, ay, may dip his hand in the same dish with the Savior, and yet betray him. We may be high in office, and may apparently be very useful, as Judas was; yet we may betray Christ.

21. *The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed!*

We learn from our Lord's words that divine decrees do not deprive a sinful action of its guilt. His criminality is just as great as though there had been no "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."

good were it for that man if he had never been born.

The doom of Judas is worse than non-existence. To have consorted with Christ as he had done, and then to deliver him into the hands of his enemies, sealed the traitor's eternal destiny.

22. *And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.*

It was part of a meal. It was no celebration. It was no sacrifice, bloody or unbloody. It was simply a commemorative ceremony, of which he would now give them a specimen even before it became commemorative. "As they did eat, Jesus took bread." No seeking for consecrated wafers or some special food, but such bread as they had been eating. "Blessed"—thanking God for it.

23, 24. *And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.*

There was no fear of their making the mistake, which had been made by Humanists, of taking these words literally, because Jesus Christ was sitting there. They could not imagine that, as he took bread, he would say literally, "This bread is my body." Why, there was his body sitting there before them. Had he two bodies? When he gave them the cup and said, "This is my blood in the new covenant," they never dreamt of such a thing as that the wine in the cup was really and literally his blood. His blood was in his veins. They saw him living there, not bleeding. No, it is an extraordinary thing that men who have the life of God in them, and have some spiritual discernment, have, nevertheless, in some instances, been found driving their faith into the belief of the absurd fable of transubstantiation. Jesus Christ means "This represents my body. This represents my blood"—the usual way of uttering such a sense both in the Old and New Testament, even as Christ said, "I am the door." Yet nobody thought that he was a door. "I am the way." Nobody thought he was a roadway. "I am the shepherd," and yet nobody supposed that he carried a crook, and that he literally kept sheep.

So says he, "This is my body, this is my blood" and they who sat there were in their senses, and they were not superstitious. They knew what he meant.

25. *Verily I say unto you, I will drink more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.*

Thus Jesus took the great Nazarite vow never to drink of the fruit of the vine till he should drink it new with his disciples in his Father's kingdom. He will keep his tryst with all his followers, and they with him shall hold high festival for ever.

26. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.*

It seems to me such a grand, brave thing for the Savior to sing a hymn after the last meal that he would eat with his disciples before his death when he knew that he was going forth to all the torture of Pilate's hall, and to death at Calvary. Yet he says, "Let us sing a hymn." He chose a Psalm of David, and, I dare say, himself pitched a tune. "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out unto the Mount of Olives."

27. *And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.*

Observe our Lord's habit of quoting Scripture. He was able to speak words of infallible truth, yet he fell back upon the Inspired Record in the Old Testament. His quotation from Zechariah does not seem to have been really. necessary, but it was most appropriate to his prophecy to his disciples: "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered! abroad." Jesus was the Shepherd who was about to be smitten, and he foretold the scattering of the sheep. Even those leaders of the flock that had been first chosen by Christ, and kind been most with him, would stumble and fall away from him on that dread night; but the Shepherd would not lose them, there would be a reunion between him and his sheep.

28. *But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.*

Once again he would resume, for a little while, the character of their Shepherd-King, and with them he would revisit some of their old haunts in Galilee, ere he ascended to his heavenly home. “I will go before you,” suggests the idea of the Good Shepherd leading his flock after the Eastern manner. Happy are his sheep in having such a Leader, and blessed are they in following him whithersoever he goeth.

29. *But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.*

This was a very presumptuous speech, not only because of the self-confidence it betrayed, but also because it was a flat contradiction of the Master’s declaration. No doubt these words were spoken from his heart; but “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Peter must have been amazed, the next morning, as he discovered the deceitfulness and wickedness of his own heart, as manifested in his triple denial of his Lord.

He who thinks himself so much stronger than his brethren, is the very man who will prove to be weaker than any of them, as did Peter, not many hours after his boast was uttered.

30. *And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.*

Jesus now tells his boastful disciple that, before the next morning’s cockcrowing, he will thrice deny his Lord Not only would he stumble and fall with his fellow-disciples, but he would go beyond them all in his repeated denials of that dear Master whom he professed to love with intenser affection than even John possessed. Peter declared that he would remain true to Christ if he were the only faithful friend left; Jesus foretold that, of all the twelve, only Judas would exceed the boaster in wickedness.

31. *But he spake the more vehemently, if I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.*

Here again Peter contradicts his Master straight to his face. It was a pity that he

should have boasted once after his Lord's plain prophecy that all the disciples would that night be offended because of him; but it was shameful that Peter should repeat his self-confident declaration in the teeth of Christ's express prediction concerning him.

Likewise also said they all.

He was not alone in his utterance, for likewise also said all the disciples. They all felt that under no circumstances could they deny their Lord. We have no record of the denial of Christ by the other ten apostles, although they all forsook him and fled, and thus practically disowned him. Remembering all that they had seen and heard of him, and especially bearing in mind his most recent discourses, the communion in the upper room, and his wondrous intercessory prayer on their behalf, we are not surprised that they felt themselves bound to him for ever. But, alas! Not withstanding their protests, the King's prophecy was completely fulfilled, for that night they were all "offended", or "caused to stumble," and Peter thrice denied his Lord.

32. *And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray.*

Our Lord directed eight of his disciples to keep watch either outside or near the entrance of Gethsemane, "the olive-press." This garden had been Christ's favorite place for private prayer, and it was well selected as the scene of his last agonizing supplication.

33. *And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy;*

The three disciples who had been with him on the Mount of Transfiguraton were privileged to be nearer to him than the rest of their brethren; but even they must not be actually with him. His sorrow was so great that he must bear it alone; and there was also that Scripture to be fulfilled, "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me." Yet would he have his three choicest companions near him, that he might derive such slight solace from their presence as they could convey to him.

They had not seen him in that state before. He seemed like one distracted, so amazed—like one astonished out of all composure unable to collect himself or to contain himself, and to be very heavy, as if an awful weight pressed on his soul.

34. *And saith unto them, my soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here and watch.*

The sorrow of his soul was the very soul of his sorrow; his soul was full of sorrow, until he seemed to reach the utmost limit of endurance, and to be at the very date of death. In such dire distress he needed faithful friends at hand, so he said to Peter, James, and John, “Tarry ye here and watch.” He must bear alone the awful burden of his people’s sin; but his disciples might show their sympathy with him by watching at a respectful distance, and adding their poor prayers to his mighty wrestlings. Alas! they did not prize the privilege Christ gave them: have not we been too much like them when our Savior has bidden us watch with him?

35, 36. *And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee: take away this cup from me; nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.*

Was he heard? Yes, verily, and. especially in that which was the very pith and marrow of his prayer: “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” This was the vital part of his petition, its true essence; for much as his human nature shrank from the “cup”, still more did he shrink from any thought of acting contrary to his Father’s will. Christ’s sense of sonship was clear and undimmed even in that dark hour, for he began his prayer with the filial utterance, “O my father.”

37. *And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping. And saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?*

Matthew and Luke tell us that he said “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” and Mark tells us here that he especially said that to Peter. Now remember that Mark is the gospel of Peter. No doubt Mark was the great friend of Peter, and

writes his gospel from Peter's point, so Peter in the Gospel of Mark records the worst things about himself, and he just puts it here that the Master said, "Simon, sleepest thou?" Bad enough for the others to be asleep, but "Simon, sleepest thou? Couldest not thou watch one hour?"

38. *Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.*

It was truly kind on Christ's part to find an excuse for his weak and weary disciples; it was just like him to say anything that he could in their praise even though they had slept when they ought to have watched. Yet he repeated the command, "Watch" for that was the special duty of the hour; and he added, "and pray," for prayer would help them to watch, and watching would aid them in praying. Watching and praying were enjoined for a special purpose: "that ye enter not into temptation." He knew what sore temptations were about to assail them, so he would have them doubly armed by watching unto prayer.

39, 40. *And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words. And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy), neither wist they what to answer him.*

How could they excuse their conduct? A second time asleep! They were in a muddled state.

41, 42. *And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand.*

I do not think Jesus was speaking ironically when he said, "Sleep on now, and take your rest:" but that he allowed them to take a little sleep while he sat by, and watched. Not long did he sit, or did they sleep; for through the olives he could see the glare of the approaching torches, and the stillness of the night was broken by the tramping and shouting of the rabble throng that had come to arrest him. He gently wakened his drowsy disciples by saying, "Rise, let us go:" adding

words that must have struck terror to their sorrowing hearts: “behold the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” The crushing in “the olivepress” was over. The long looked-for “hour” of betrayal had come; and Jesus went calmly forward, divinely strengthened to meet the terrible trials that yet awaited him ere he could fully accomplish the redemption of his chosen people.

43-45. *And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; take him, and lead him away safely. And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him.*

It is a remarkable fact that we do not read, in the New Testament, that any one of the twelve, except Judas ever kissed Jesus. It seems as if the most impudent familiarity was very near akin to dastardly treachery. This sign of Judas was typical of the way in which Jesus is generally betrayed. When men intend to undermine the inspiration of the Scriptures, how do they begin their books? Why, always with a declaration that they wish to promote the truth of Christ! Christ’s name is often slandered by those who make a loud profession of attachment to him, and then sin foully as the chief of transgressors. There is the Judas-kiss first, and the betrayal afterwards. Thus Judas said, “Hail, master” and kissed him; betraying him by the act that ought to have been the token of firmest friendship.

46. *And they laid their hands on him, and took him.*

He offered no resistance, although the whole multitude would have been powerless to seize him unless he had been willing to be taken.

47. *And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear.*

A good man’s hand is never more out of place than when it is on the sword-hilt;

yet there is always a tendency, even among Christians, to draw the sword from its scabbard. It would have been far better if Peter's hands had been clasped in prayer. That act of cutting off the ear of Malchus helped to identify him as one who was with Christ in the garden, and directly led to one of his denials of his Lord (John 8:26, 27). The sword never helps to establish Christ's kingdom; all that is ever done by it will have to be undone. Brute force will throw down what brute force has built up.

48. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me?*

It did seem a great farce for multitudes with swords and stares to go out from Jerusalem, at midnight, to arrest "the Man of Sorrows", who would not allow one of his followers to draw a sword in his defence. Yet even his foes knew that he possessed extraordinary power if he only chose to exert it; and their numbers, arms, and authority were so many unconscious tributes to his royal dignity and might.

49. *I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled.*

Our Lord's one great concern was that he might finish the work he had come to perform, and that so the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.

50-52. *And they all forsook him, and fled. And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: and he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.*

Jesus was not surprised that all the disciples forsook him, and fled; for he had foretold that they would do so. He knew them better than they knew themselves, so he prophesied that the flock would be scattered when the Shepherd should be smitten. So it was; for when the fierce wolves came and seized him, the sheep all fled.

It would have been to the eternal honor of any one of the disciples to have kept

close to Christ right up to the last; but neither the loving John nor the boastful Peter stood the test of that solemn time. Human nature is such poor stuff, even at the best, that we cannot hope that any of us would have been braver or more faithful than the apostles were.

53. *And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.*

Some of the chief priests and elders were so enraged against Christ that they went to Gethsemane with the Roman cohort that was sent to arrest Jesus; the rest of them met at the house of Caiaphas the high priest, waiting for their victim to be brought to them. It was night, or early morning; but they were only too willing to sit up to judge the Lord of glory, and put the King of Israel to shame.

54. *And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.*

Peter was not to be blamed because he followed afar off, for at first he and John were the only two disciples who followed their captive Master. John went with Jesus into the high priest's palace, and by his influence Peter was also admitted. Attracted by the fire, Peter sat with the servants; a dangerous place for him, as it soon proved. When a servant of Christ by his own choice sits with the servants of the wicked, sin and sorrow speedily follow.

55. *And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none.*

A pretty court that was, occupied in seeking for witnesses who might enable them to condemn to death a prisoner against whom no charge had yet been formulated.

We may regard what was said to Jesus, by Annas and Caiaphas, as a sort of unofficial preliminary examination; and, meanwhile, their fellow conspirators were scouring the streets of Jerusalem to gather together the members of the Sanhedrim, and also searching among the slums in order to find witnesses who could be bribed to give false evidence against Jesus.

56–59. *For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together.*

It was a rule that they should be examined separately, and there had not been time for them to be coached up as to what they were to say, so one contradicted the other, and it looked as if the trial must break down.

60, 61. *And the high priest stood up in the midst,*

Losing all patience, he stood up, in a furious rage at the torn things were taking.

And asked Jesus, saying, Answered thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing.

What was the use of answering? There really was nothing to answer except palpable and wilful misrepresentation. Our Lord also knew that the council had determined to put him to death; and beside that, there was another prophecy to be fulfilled: “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, art thou the Christ? the Son of the Blessed?

This time, according to Matthew’s account, the high priest said to Jesus, “I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.” Being thus, as it were, put upon his oath, the Savior felt compelled to answer. He could not remain silent when such a great and important question was at stake.

62. *And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on*

the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

The time for Christ to speak had come. First he answered the high priest's solemn adjuration, and declared that he was "The Christ the Son of God." There was no longer any reason for concealing that fact Then he uttered a prophecy that must have startled his accusers. He stood there bound, apparently alone and helpless before his powerful enemies, who expected soon to put him to death; yet the Prophet-King declared that they should be witnesses of his future glory, and see him "sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." His hearers rightly understood him to claim to be divine, and gladly do we acknowledge the justice of his claim.

63, 64. *Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.*

If he had not been God Incarnate, he would have been guilty of blasphemy, and would have deserved to die. By the law of Moses, a blasphemer was to be stoned to death (Leviticus 24:16). Christ's works had proved that he was God, so his words were not those of a blasphemer; but his confession gave his enemies the opening they were seeking, and they declared him to be unworthy to live. He had foretold that he would be crucified, whereas the punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning; so further forms of trial must be gone through before the end would come.

65. *And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophesy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.*

Oh, what shameful indignities and cruelties were heaped upon our precious Savior! In the day of his humiliation, they struck him, and mocked him, saying, "Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?" Unless they repented of their wickedness, the day will come when the Divine Judge will point out each one of them who then abused him, and he will say, "Thou art the man!"

66, 67. *And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: and when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.*

While our Lord was in the high priest's house, Peter sat without in the palace. In the courtyard overlooked by the rooms of the palace, the servants and officers had lighted a fire to warm themselves while they waited to see what would be done with Jesus.

Peter joined the company, and a damsel, who had let him in at John's request, said to him, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee."

68. *But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest.*

Now came the test of his confident boast to his Lord, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." But he denied before them all saying, "I know not what thou sayest." Whatever the consequences of confessing Christ might have been to Peter, they could not have been as bad as this base denial was.

And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.

This first time was not the regular season of cock-crowing, but those birds crow when they please. Before the fixed period called the cock-crowing, Peter was to deny his Master three times; this was the first time.

69, 70. *And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is one of them. And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.*

"Thou hast the peculiar brogue of that part of the country: 'Thou art a Galilaean, and thy speech agreeth thereto.'"

71, 72. *But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak. And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cockcrow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.*

He does not say that he went out, and wept bitterly, as Luke says in his version of the incident. This is Peter’s own account of it, so he says as little as he can to his own credit, while he tells all that is to his discredit.

Mark 15

1. *And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate.*

“The whole council” could be there, so early in the morning, for such an evil purpose. Wicked men are very diligent in carrying out their sinful schemes; so, when Christ was to be murdered, his enemies were there, as Luke tells us, “as soon as it was day.” How much more diligent ought the followers of Christ to be to give him their devoted service! It is a good thing to begin the day with united prayer and holy converse with his people. Let these wicked men, who were so early in the morning seeking to secure the death of Christ, make us ashamed that we are not more diligent in his blessed service.

2. *And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it.*

Jesus did not look much like a king as he stood before Pilate; there was little enough of the robes of royalty about his simple apparel. Yet even in his humiliation there must have been so much of majesty that even the governor was prompted to ask, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” There was no longer any reason why the King should conceal his true position, so he answered, “Thou sayest it.” “It is even as thou sayest, I am the King of the Jews.” The Jews rejected their King: “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” Yet was he their King although they refused to bow before his sceptre of grace and mercy.

3. *And the chief priest accused him of many things: but he answered nothing.*

Silence was the best answer, the most eloquent reply, that he could give to each accusers; they deserved no other answer. Moreover, by his silence, he was fulfilling the prophecy, “As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

4, 5. *And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled.*

You will often find that your highest wisdom, when you are slandered, will lie in the imitation of your Lord and Master. Live a blameless life, and it shall be the best reply to the false charges of the wicked.

6–10. *Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired. And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection. And the multitude crying aloud began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto these. But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priest has delivered him for envy.*

Pilate was really anxious to deliver Christ from his cruel enemies; but; like most wicked men, he was a great coward, so he attempted to gain his end by a crafty artifice. He knew that they had delivered him for envy; and he may have hoped that Jesus was so popular among the people that an appeal to the masses would result in a verdict in Christ’s favor, especially as the choice of one to be released lay between “the King of the Jews” and a notoriously wicked man, Barabbas. Surely they would ask for their King to be set at liberty! Pilate little knew the sway the chief priests had over the populace, nor the fickleness of the crowds, whose jubilant cry of “Hosanna! “would so soon be changed to hoarse shouts of “Away with him! Crucify him!”

11–13. *But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King*

of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify him.

Now the die is cast, the choice of the multitude is made; Barabbas is preferred before Jesus. The Lord of glory had been sold by Judas for the price of a slave; and now a robber, a murderer, and a leader in sedition, is a greater favorite with the people than the Prince of life. Were there no voices raised in Christ's favor? Were there none out of all that multitude whose sick he had healed, whoso hunger he had satisfied, who would remember him in that day, and ask that he might be spared? No, not one; there were none in the crowd silently sympathising with the Savior; they all said, "Crucify him."

14. *Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him.*

A blind, unreasoning hate had taken possession of the people. They gave no answer to Pilate's wondering enquiry, "Why, what evil hath he done?" for he had done nothing amiss; they only repeated the brutal demand, "Crucify him."

The world's hatred of Christ is shown in similar fashion today. He has done no evil, no one has suffered harm at his hands, all unite to pronounce him innocent; and yet they practically cry, "Away with him! Crucify him!"

15. *And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.*

The Roman scourging was one of the most terrible punishments to which anyone could be subjected. The Jewish beating with rods was a mild chastisement compared with the brutal flagellation by the imperial lictors; yet even this our Lord endured for our sakes. These were the stripes by which we were healed (1 Peter 2:24). Yet the scourging was but the beginning of the awful end: When he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified. Knowing him to be innocent, Pilate first scourged him, and then gave him up to the fury of his fanatical foes.

16-19. *And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium,*

and they call together the whole band. And they clothed him with purple,

The uniform of the Roman soldiers was purple, as if to indicate that they belonged to an imperial master; so, when these soldiers, in mockery put on our Lord the old cloak of one of their comrades, it sufficed to clothe him with the royal purple to which, as King, he was fully entitled.

and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head, and began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him on the head with a reed, and did spit upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him.

All this homage was paid to him in mockery yet what stern reality there was in that mockery! That band of soldiers really preached to Christ such homage as a whole world could give him.

20. *And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple from him, and put his own clothes on him, and led him out to crucify him.*

They "led him out to crucify him." It seems as if Christ had to lean upon those who led him; the word almost signifies as much as that; at least, it might be the word employed concerning anyone leading a child or a sick man who needed support, for the Savior's weakness must have been very apparent by that time. After the agony and bloody sweat in Gethsemane, and, and the night and morning trials, and scourging, and mockery, and the awful strain upon his mind and heart in being made a sacrifice for sin, it was no wonder that he was weak. Besides, he was not like the rough, brutal criminals that are often condemned to die for their crimes; he was a man of gentle mould and more delicate sensibilities than they were, and he suffered much more than any ordinary man would have done in similar circumstances.

21. *And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross.*

Perhaps they were afraid that Christ would die from exhaustion; so they compelled Simon to bear his cross, Any one of Christ's followers might have wished to have been this man of Cyrene; but we need not envy him, for there is a cross for each of us to carry. Oh, that we were as willing to bear Christ's cross as Christ was to bear our sins on his cross! If anything happens to us by way of persecution or ridicule for our Lord's sake, and the gospel's, let us cheerfully endure it. As knights are made by a stroke from the sovereign's sword, so shall we become princes in Christ's realm as he lays his cross on our shoulders.

22. *And they bring him*

Here the word almost implies that they lifted him, and-carried him, for his faintness had increased. They "led him out to crucify him," but now they bear him—

unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull.

Golgotha was the common place of execution for malefactors, the Tyburn or Old Bailey of Jerusalem, outside the gate of the city. There was a special symbolical reason for Christ's suffering without the gate, and his followers are bidden to "go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Hebrews 13:11-13).

23. *And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.*

He did not wish to have his sufferings abated, but to bear them to the bitter end. Christ forbids not that pain should be alleviated, in the case of others, wherever that is possible; but, in his own case, it was not fit that it should be so relieved, since he was to bear the full brunt of the storm of vengeance that was due on account of sin.

24. *And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take.*

The criminals' clothes were the executioners' perquisite. The Roman soldiers who crucified Christ had no thought of fulfilling the Scriptures when they parted his garments, casting lots; yet their action was exactly that which had been foretold in Psalm 22:18. The seamless robe would have been spoiled if it had been rent, so the soldiers raffled for the veature while they shared the other garments of our Lord. The dice would be almost stained with the blood of Christ, yet the gamblers played on beneath the shadow of his cross. Gambling is the most hardening of all vices. Beware of it in any form! No games of chance should be played by Christians, for the blood of Christ seems to have bespattered them all.

25. *And it was the third hour, and they crucified him.*

There is a world of meaning in that short sentence, and they crucified him, driving their bolts of iron through his blessed hands and feet, fastening him to the cross, and lifting him up to hang there upon a gibbet reserved for felons.

26. *And the superscription of his accusation was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

What a marvellous providence it was that moved Pilate's pen! The representative of the Roman emperor was little likely to concede kingship to any man; yet he deliberately wrote, THE KING OF THE JEWS, and nothing would induce him to alter what he had written. Even on his cross, Christ was proclaimed King, in the sacerdotal Hebrew, the classical Greek, and the common Latin, so that everybody in the crowd could read the inscription.

When will the Jews own Jesus as their King? They will do so one day, looking on him whom they pierced. Perhaps they will think more of Christ when Christians think more of them; when our hardness of heart towards them has gone, possibly their hardness of heart towards Christ may also disappear.

27. *And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left.*

s if to show that they regarded Christ as the worst of the three criminals, they put

him between the two thieves, giving him the place of dishonor. Thus was the prophecy fulfilled, “He was numbered with the transgressors.” The two malefactors deserved to die, as one of them admitted (Luke 23:40, 41); but a greater load of guilt rested upon Christ, for “He bare the sin of many,” and therefore he was rightly distinguished as the King of sufferers, who could truly ask, “Was ever grief like mine?”

28. *And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors.*

Sinners to the right of him, sinners to the left of him, sinners all round him, compassed about with those who sinned in the very highest degree by putting him to death: “He was numbered with the transgressors.” Oh, that sweet word! It is the hope of transgressors now that he was counted with them, and for his sake all the benefactions of heaven now descend upon transgressors who accept him as their Substitute and Savior.

29, 30. *And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross.*

Nothing torments a man when in pain more than mockery. When Jesus Christ most wanted words of pity and looks of kindness, they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads. Perhaps the most painful part of ridicule is to have one’s most solemn sayings turned to scorn, as were our Lord’s words about the temple of his body: “Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself.” He might have saved himself, he might have “come down from the cross; “but if he had done so, we could never have become the sons of God. It was because he was the Son of God that he did not come down from the cross, but hung there until he had completed the sacrifice for his people’s sin. Christ’s cross is the Jacob’s ladder by which we mount up to heaven.

This is the cry of the Socinians today, “Come down from the cross. Give up the atoning sacrifice, and we will be Christians.” Many are willing to believe in Christ, but not in Christ crucified. They admit that he was a good man and a great teacher; but by rejecting his vicarious atonement, they practically un-Christ the Christ, as these mockers at Golgotha did.

31, 32. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross,*

The chief priests, forgetting their high station and rank, joined the ribald crew in mocking Jesus in his death pangs. Every word was emphatic; every syllable cut and pierced our Lord to the heart. They mocked him as a Savior: “He saved others; himself he cannot save.” They mocked him as a King: “Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross.” Those who say that Christ was a good man virtually admit his deity, for he claimed to be the Son of God. If he was not what he professed to be, he was an impostor. Notice the testimony that Christ’s bitterest enemies bore even as they reviled him: “He saved others;” “He is the King of Israel.”

that we may see and believe.

That is the world’s way: “that we may see and believe.” But Christ’s way is, “Believe, and thou shalt see.” Christ off the cross is admired by worldlings, but Christ on the cross is our hope and stay, especially as we know that this same Christ is now on the throne waiting for the time when he should return to claim his own all who have trusted in the Crucified.

32. *And they that were crucified with him reviled him.*

The sharers of his misery, the abjects who were crucified with him, joined in reviling Jesus. Nothing was wanting to fill up his cup of suffering and shame. The conversion of the penitent thief was all the more remarkable because he had but a little while before been amongst the mockers of his Savior. What a trophy of divine grace he became!

33. *And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.*

A supernatural darkness, which could not have occurred according to the laws of nature. It did, as it were, “set a tabernacle for the sun,”—the Sun of

Righteousness was canopied a while in darkness, that no longer might those horrible eyes gaze upon his terrible anguish.

34. *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

In order that the sacrifice of Christ might be complete, it pleased the Father to forsake his well-beloved Son. Sin was laid on Christ, so God must turn away his face from the Sin-Bearer. To be deserted of his God, was the climax of Christ's grief, the quintessence of his sorrow. See here the distinction between the martyrs and their Lord; in their dying agonies they have been divinely sustained; but Jesus, suffering as the Substitute for sinners, was forsaken of God. Those saints who have known what it is to have their Father's face hidden from them even for a brief space, can scarcely imagine the suffering that wrung from our Savior the agonizing cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

35. *And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias.*

Ah, me! This was either a cruel jest upon our Savior's prayer, or an utter misapprehension of it.

36. *And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.*

One of them, more compassionate than his companions, ran, and took a spurge, and filled it with vinegar, from the vessel probably brought by the soldiers for their own use, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. It always seems to me very remarkable that the sponge, which is the very lowest form of animal life, should have been brought into contact with Christ, who is at the top of all life. In his death the whole circle of creation was completed. As the sponge brought refreshment to the lips of our dying Lord, so may the least of God's living ones help to refresh him now that he has ascended from the cross to the throne.

37. *And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost.*

Christ's strength was not exhausted; his last word was uttered with a loud voice, like the shout of a conquering warrior. And what a word it was, "It is finished"! Thousands of sermons have been preached upon that little sentence; but who can tell all the meaning that lies compacted within it? It is a kind of infinite expression for breadth, and depth, and length, and height altogether immeasurable. Christ's life being finished, perfected, completed; he yielded up the ghost, willingly dying, laying down his life as he said he would: "I lay down my life for the sheep. I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

38. *And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.*

Even as the flesh of Christ, which is the veil of the Incarnate God, was rent, so now was the veil of mystery taken away. The temple in her sorrow rent her veil. The old ceremonial law passed away with this token of grief by the rending of the veil. It was a strong, I might say, a massive veil; it could not have been rent by any ordinary means; but when the hand of God takes hold upon the veil of Jewish types, it readily rends, and into the innermost mystery of the holy of holies we may gaze, yea, and through it we may enter.

39. *And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.*

Probably saying a great deal more than he understood. There was something so extraordinary about this central Sufferer that the Centurion could not understand who he could be unless he was truly "the Son of God."

40, 41. *There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses, and Salome; (Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him, and ministered unto him;) and many other women which came up with*

him unto Jerusalem.

We have no record of any unkindness to our Lord from any woman, though we have many narratives of the loving ministry of women at various periods in his life. It was meet, therefore, that even at Calvary many women were there beholding afar off. The ribald crowd and the rough soldiers would not permit these timid yet brave souls to come near; but we learn from John 9:25 that some of them edged their way through the throng till they "stood by the cross of Jesus." Love will dare anything.

42, 43. *And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, an honorable counselor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus.*

I have no doubt that Pilate was very surprised that a member of the Sanhedrim should come and ask for the body of Jesus, when, a little while before, he had put him to death really by the mandate of that body of men.

Joseph and Nicodemus are types of many more who have been emboldened by the cross of Christ to do what, without that mighty magnet, they would never have attempted. When night comes, the stars appear; so in the night of Christ's death these two bright stars shone forth with blessed radiance. Some flowers bloom only at night: such a blossom was the courage of Joseph and Nicodemus.

44, 45. *And Pilate marvelled if he were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph.*

This very centurion, who had declared that Jesus was the Son of God now came forward to bear witness that he had seen him die; and then Pilate told Joseph that he might go and take the body.

46. *And he bought fine linen,*

This was probably the first time that fine linen had touched the flesh of the Son of man; he had been accustomed to much coarser stuff in his lifetime, but now Joseph “bought fine linen.”

and took him down, and wrapped him in the linen, and laid him in a sepulcher which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone into the door of the sepulcher.

Our King, even in the grave, must have the best of the best: his body was wrapped in a clean linen cloth, and, laid in Joseph’s own new tomb, thus completing the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9. Some see in this linen shroud an allusion to the garments in which priests were to be clothed.

That rock-hewn cell in the garden sanctified every part of God’s acre where saints lie buried. Instead of longing to live till Christ comes, as some do, we might rather pray to have fellowship with Jesus in his death and burial.

47. *And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses beheld where he was laid.*

Love and faith were both typified by these two Marys. They will be the last to leave their Lord’s resting-place, and the first to return to it when the Sabbath is past.

That is Mark’s account of our Lord’s death and burial, very terse, and very suggestive.

Mark 16

1. *And when the sabbath was past, Mary, Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.*

We know that “him” whose name is not given here. There is scarcely need to mention that it was Jesus whom the women came to anoint. Oh, how gladly would we also anoint “him” whose name is The Anointed One! But not as a dead Christ, for “He is risen.” Our sweet spices must henceforth be for that living One whom we anoint with our living joy and consecration; or, rather, we must receive our anointing from him, for he is the Christ, and we the Christians who get our very name and life from him.

As he was supposed to be dead, and still lying in the tomb, these holy women came to anoint him,

2. *And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.*

There had already been another rising of the sun that morning, for the Sun of righteousness had risen; and, with his rising, our hopes had risen, and eternal life had come to light.

These holy women proved their affection to their Lord by being there so early. Love will not wait; it delights to render its service as speedily as ever it can: “They came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.”

3. *And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?*

A question that has puzzled many other people concerning many ether things perplexed these holy women, yet there was no reason for the question to be raised at all. Peradventure, some of you are at this time distressed when there is no cause for distress, and in fear where no fear is.

It was so with these women, who said, one to another, “Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?”

4. *And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great.*

And, therefore, hard to roll away; and, therefore, the more easily seen when it was rolled away; and, therefore, the greater cause for joy that it was rolled away. In the greatness of our troubles there may often be space for the greater display of the goodness of God; a great trial may be nothing more than the prelude of a great joy. Do not dread the foaming billows, for they may wash you ashore; it is the worst that they can do, and it is the best also. The stone at the door of the sepulcher was very great, but it was rolled away, so that it mattered not to the women how great it was.

5. *And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted.*

An angel had been allowed to assume the appearance of a man; that usually seems to be the way in which angels appear to men. I suppose there is, after all, a great kinship between angels and men; otherwise, angelic beings would not so constantly assume that form when they appear to men. At the sight of the young man clothed in a long white garment, these good women were affrighted.

6. *And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted:*

Why should they be affrighted? They had come to serve their Lord, and so had the angel, so there was no cause for fear. Those who love Jesus need never be afraid of angels; nor, for the matter of that, of devils either; for the Lord, whom they serve, will take care of them.

Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified:

This was the first gospel sermon preached after the resurrection, so note particularly how the angel describes Christ. He calls him by his lowly name, "Jesus of Nazareth," and does not speak of him as the risen or reigning Christ, but as "Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified." The angels are evidently not ashamed f the cross of Christ, they do not attempt to hide the shame of it; for this one speaks of "Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified."

He is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him

That is the epitaph inscribed on Christ's tomb: "He is not here." On other people's graves it is written, "Here lies so-and-so;" but on Christ's sepulcher it is recorded, "He is not here." He is everywhere else, but "he is not here." He is with us in our solitude, he is with us in our public assemblies; but there is one place where he is not; and that is, in the empty tomb. Thank God that he is not there; we do not worship a dead man lying in the grave. He, on whom we rely, has risen from the dead, and gone up into the glory, where he ever liveth to carry out the great design of salvation. "He is not here."

7. *Tell his disciples and Peter that he doeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.*

There are some beautiful touches in that short speech. "Tell his disciples and Peter"—the one that denied that he was his disciple—tell him If you omit anybody else, do not forget poor Peter. And then that other word, As he said unto you." Christ's words are always fulfilled, and if even an angel should come from heaven to tell God' people of some choice blessing that was coming to them, it would only be a blessing that Christ had already promised. "As he said unto you."

8. *And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulcher; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid.*

There was a mixture of joy with their fear, and of fear with their joy, and that tended to keep them silent for a while. Some people tell all they know, even when it would be wiser not to speak; but these godly women waited till they reached those to whom they were bidden to speak. They said nothing to anybody by the way, but hurried on to find the disciples, that they might give them the blessed tidings of their Lord's resurrection.

9. *Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.*

It has been a general tradition in the Church of Christ that Mary Magdalene was a great sinner; I do not feel sure that she was, but still, she is the type of a great sinner. The seven devils that were within her do not represent actual guilt on her part, but they depict or symbolize the subjection of her nature to the power of Satan. It is very beautiful to notice that those people for whom Christ does most he seems to love best; yet this is also according to human nature, for if there be a child in the family that the mother loves most, it is the one that was the hardest to bring up, and who has cost her most of care and most of labor. The casting out of seven devils endears the Magdalene to Christ, and first of all he appears to her. Besides, she loved much, doubtless, and she was quick of sight, so she saw him first. O my soul, if thou hast been a great sinner, do not take any place but that of first in love and first in fellowship with Christ! Be thou content to be nothing, but be thou anxious to make him thy all in all.

10. *And she went and told them that had been with him, as they mourned and wept.*

It is a curious "interior" that Mark here sketches, or rather stipples, with just a few touches. There are most of Christ's disciples, who had been with him, sitting mourning and weeping over his death, and in comes Mary, and says that she has seen him alive.

11. *And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not.*

This was both cruel to the Magdalene and forgetful of their Master's word, but unbelief is a very cruel thing. It is not only grievous to ourselves, but it acts in a shameful manner to Christian brethren and sisters, and worst of all is its treatment of our Divine Master himself. It says that he is dead, when truly he is alive. Unbelief has no good in it; it is altogether evil, only evil, and that continually. The Lord deliver us from it!

12–13. *After that he appeared in another form unto two of them, as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them.*

It is very hard to kill unbelief, it has more lives than a cat is supposed to possess. There is no end to it, and if men sit down and indulge in it, and Took upon it as an infirmity, or as a painful trial, instead of regarding it as an abominable sin against the Lord, they are likely to sink deeper and deeper into this horrible mire.

14. *Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart*

Christ is full of love to them, yet he must upbraid them, he loves them, but he loves not their unbelief; nay, he is more vexed with unbelief in them than in other people.

14, 15. *Because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

That commission of our Lord makes me smile, for it seems such a curious cure for unbelief, yet I have proved the usefulness of it many a time. There have I been sitting down, fretting and worrying, and my Master, instead of giving me some gracious promise, that I might sit there by myself, and enjoy its sweetness, hag said, "Up with you; go into the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." Those who preach most, if they preach with all their hearts, will believe most, and they will grow strong enough to tread their doubts beneath their feet. So ought it to be. In the lives of those who have brought many to

Christ, I do not, as a rule, read long chapters about their doubts and fears. No, but God encourages them by the signs and seals which he gives them; they see his hand with them, they mark how the Lord works with them and by them, and they forget their unbelief.

16. *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

There stands the commission then—the grand summary of Christ's message to a perishing world. We must never alter it. We must not leave out the baptism, or put it before the believing, or leave out the solemn sentence with which it closes, though there are some that burn and hate very dreadfully when they get there. The Lord clear their throats, and help them to preach the gospel as he bade them preach it—"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."

17, 18. *And these signs shall follow them that believe, In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues, they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.*

The apostles and the early Christians had these miraculous signs, there was no need that they should be given over again. The seal was set upon the gospel at the first. A man buys a house, and on the first day when he takes possession, he gets the signature of the seller, and the legal seal upon the conveyance. That matter is done; if he ever doubts his right to the property, he can always look back to that seal. He does not want a fresh lot of sealing wax every five minutes; neither do we need continual miracles.

The Church of Christ at first was like a ship going to sea, the tug takes her out of the harbour, but when she is fairly out at sea, she does not need the tug any longer, she is dependent then upon the wind from heaven and so she speeds on her way. Or, the Church is like a young tree newly planted in the orchard; it has a stake stuck in the ground by the side of it, to which it is tied; but when it grows into a strong tree, where is the stake? The tree does not require it, for it stands fast by other means; it is just so with us and the miracles which were needed at the first.

19. *So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.*

The disciples were not at once received up into heaven, though they might have been if God had so willed it, there was work for them to do here below, so Christ alone "was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God;" and as for his followers—

20. *And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.*

These last verses of Mark's Gospel have, as some of you know, been questioned as to their inspiration and authenticity, but they are so like Mark that you cannot read them without feeling that they are part and parcel of what the Evangelist wrote. Set any critic you please to work; and if he knows the idiom and style of Mark's writing, he will be bound to say that this is part of the Gospel according to Mark; and God the Holy Spirit, blessing these words to our hearts, as I trust he will, will set his seal to what we believe and know to be his inspired Word.

LUKE

Luke 1

1-6. *Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*

You have here a very interesting couple, Zacharias and Elisabeth, a priest with a wife. I have often marveled why the Church of Rome should think it wrong that priests should be married, when it is evident that the priests under the law were so. The priests had grown so numerous that there was not room for them all to work at the Temple at one time; they were divided into twenty-four courses, and Zacharias would, therefore, come up to Jerusalem for a fortnight to take his share of the service. Zacharias and Elisabeth were notable for excellence of character: “They were both righteous before God.” Not only did they stand high

in the esteem of men, but the great God, who reads the hearts of all, and sees how they live in secret, reckoned them to be righteous: “They were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments”—that is, in the moral precepts of the law—“and ordinances”—that is in the ceremonial rites—“of the Lord blameless.”

7. *And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.*

We do not, at the present time, understand the anguish which filled the heart of an Eastern woman who had no child. It was considered to be a disgrace, and many suffered very bitterly on that account; as did Hannah, and Rachel, and others besides.

8, 9. *And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest’s office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest’s office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord,*

Certain offices of the priest were considered to be more honorable than others; and so, to prevent any jealousy, they cast lots as to which they should take in turn. It fell to the lot of Zacharias to burn incense; this did not happen by chance. “The lot is east into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord;” and there was a special reason why this good man should stand at the altar at this particular time.

10. *And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense.*

While he, in the inner shrine, was burning incense, the multitudes in the outer courts were engaging in prayer. I think that is a very beautiful symbol—the priest unseen, like the Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy of Holies above, and the mass of the people engaged in prayer while the unseen priest is offering the sacred perfume before the altar of Jehovah.

11, 12. *And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.*

He was a good man, yet he was troubled at the sight of an angel. Consciousness of sin, even in an outwardly blameless man, makes us all tremble in the presence of anything heavenly. This bright spirit had come fresh from the courts of God; he was a courtier of the heavenly Temple, and he had come down on a sudden with a sweet and cheering message for the earthly priest; but the priest "was troubled, and fear fell upon him."

Brethren, we cannot know much of heaven here below, because it would cause us trembling; we are as yet unfit for all the glories of that upper state.

Good John Berridge wrote,—

"And now they range the heavenly plains,
And sing their hymns in melting strains;
And now their souls begin to prove
The heights and depths of Jesus' love.

"Ah Lord, with tardy steps I creep,
And sometimes sing, and sometimes weep;
Yet strip me of this house of clay,
And I will sing as loud as they."

Yes, and so will we; we will be as much at home as the happy saints, who dwell in light, when once we are delivered from this hampering flesh and blood.

13. *But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard;*

The best quietus to fear is answered prayer. If God has heard thee, be not thou again afraid.

and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

“The grace” or “the gift of God”, so the name “John” signifies; and it is a sweet name for anyone to bear: “Thou shalt call his name John.” I do not think the prayer alluded to here was so much a prayer for a son; if so, methinks that Zacharias had long ago left off praying it, and now his old prayers are heard, after he had discontinued them. I think that it alludes rather to his prayer for the coming of the Christ, the appearance of the Messiah; that prayer was heard, as we shall see further on.

14-17. *And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink;*

I do not say that it is the duty of every man to drink neither wine nor strong drink, but I beg every man to notice that if anyone was to be peculiarly consecrated to a holy calling, it was always to be so; “He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.” If there be nothing defiling about wine or strong drink, there is certainly nothing sanctifying about it; and the tendency seems to lie the other way, else it is a strange thing that men dedicated to God were so continually bidden to drink neither wine nor strong drink.

And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Happy is the father of such a child! Happy is that man whose office it is to be the herald of Christ! Brethren, many of us are called to that office in a certain sense as we come in our Master’s name, and preach concerning him

“‘Tis all my business here below
To cry, ‘Behold the Lamb.’”

And in this way we may be partakers of John the Baptist’s joy.

18–20. *And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this! for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And, the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.*

Many a child of God is dumb, because of unbelief. Mary believed, and therefore she sang a holy, joyous song—a sweet canticle of delight: "My soul doth magnify the Lord." But Zacharias, because of his unbelief, was unable to speak. I wonder whether there is a man here who might have spoken for his God with power, but whose mouth is closed because of his unbelief. If so, may the Lord hasten the time when his dumbness shall be ended!

21, 22. *And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.*

By the signs he made, he impressed them with the fact that something extraordinary had happened.

23–25. *And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me to take away my reproach among men.*

I do not wonder that, in her solemn joy, she shunned the gossips of the neighborhood and kept herself in seclusion. I do believe that there is many a soul which, when it has found Christ, feels itself much too full of joy to speak, and asks not for a crowded temple, but for a quiet chamber where the heart may pour itself out before God.

26, 27. *And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.*

It was by the temptation of an evil angel that man fell, and Paradise was lost, it was, therefore, most appropriate that good angels should be sent to announce the coming of the Restorer, through whom Paradise is regained:

"Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth."

Christ's coming to earth must be announced in the lowliest of cities, and he must be born in the small Judaean town of Bethlehem; but it was also decreed that he must die at Jerusalem—in the metropolitan city. Mark the simplicity, and yet the sublimity, of the arrangement by which the meek and lowly Savior was to be born in our nature. The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a virgin, whose name was Mary.

28, 29. *And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.*

The best of news may sometimes cause the greatest perturbation of mind and heart. If you feel troubled when you receive a message from God do not be astonished, as though some strange thing had happened unto you.

See how Mary, who was told that she was to receive the greatest honor and favor possible to a mortal being, was troubled by the angel's speech, perplexed by his extraordinary salutation.

30. *And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God.*

If we have found favor with God, there is no cause for us to fear. If God is gracious to us, we are raised above all reason for alarm. Some court the fickle

favor of men; but, even if they gain it, they may well fear that they may shortly lose it, but the angel said, “Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favor with God;” and having found that favor, she would never lose it.

31, 32. *And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great*

How true is that prophecy; “He shall be great.” Christ is the greatest of all great ones. How great he is in our esteem! The tongues of men and of angels could not tell all his greatness. “He shall be great,”—

32–37. *And shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.*

For with God nothing shall be impossible. It seemed meet that the gospel dispensation should thus begin with two great wonders. The age of wonders has opened upon us now that the day of grace has dawned. Now shall the barren woman keep house, and be the joyful mother of children, according to the ancient prophecy.

38. *And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.*

Oh, that we all had such a spirit of submission as she had, that we might be willing to place ourselves absolutely at God’s disposal, for him to do with us as he pleased!

And the angel of the Lord departed from her.

His mission was accomplished, so he might go back to the glory from which he had come at God's command.

39–41. *And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; and entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:*

We do not read that Mary was filled with the Holy Ghost, possibly because she was always in that condition, living very near to God in hallowed fellowship. Some of us have occasional fillings with the Holy Spirit, but blessed are they who dwell in him, having been baptized into him, and enjoying continual nearness to God as the blessed result.

42, 43. *And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*

The most gracious people are always the most humble people. This question of Elizabeth, "Whence is this to me?" has been one that we have often put concerning ourselves. She was the older woman of the two, but she felt herself highly honored by this visit from her younger relative, whom the Lord had so wondrously favored. It is well when Christian people have a high regard for one another, and think less of themselves than they do of others whom God has especially favored. It is one of the traits in the character of God's true people, that they have this mind in them; while they who think themselves great prove that they are not the Lord's. If you think much of yourself, he thinks little of you.

44, 45. *For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the bale leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.*

What a benediction that is! If any of us truly believe God's Word, we are blessed from that very fact, for God's promise never misses its due performance. Men find it convenient to forget their promises, but God never forgets; he takes as much delight in keeping his promise as he does in making it.

46. *And Mary said*

This humble Jewish maiden was a woman of great natural ability. This song of hers is worthy to be sung throughout all ages. It is true that it is mainly taken from the song of Hannah, and other songs of devout persons in former ages; but this shows how Mary had studied the Word of God, and laid it up in her heart. The best preparation that you young people can have for the highest honor and service in your future life is to bathe frequently in the Word of God, and to perfume your whole life by a familiar and accurate acquaintance with Scripture truth. Nothing else can make you so pure, or so prepared for all service which God may yet have for you to perform.

My soul doth magnify the Lord

She was weary, for she had come a long journey, but she was like Abraham's servant, who said, "I will not eat, until I have told mine errand."

So Mary will not eat until she has sung the praises of her God: "My soul doth magnify the Lord,"—

47. *And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.*

She needed a Savior, you see. Though about to become the mother of Jesus, Mary did not think herself without sin. Her eyes still looked to him who should be her Savior from guilt and condemnation.

48. *For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:*

The family from which Mary sprang had become poor, and she dwelt in lowliness at Nazareth.

for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

Some have done so to the grief of genuine Christians, for they have apostatized from the faith, and made Mary into a kind of goddess, and, therefore, Protestant Christians have gone to the other extreme, and have not always given to her the respect which is due to her.

49. *For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name.*

She was indeed a blessed woman to have such holy thoughts, such reverence for God, such a true idea of his might and majesty, and of the marvellous favor which he had shown to her.

50. *And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.*

Remember this, it was not mercy to Mary only; it was mercy to us, and mercy to all, who truly trust the Savior in whom she trusted.

Notice how Mary quotes Scripture. Her mind seems to have been saturated with the Word of God, as though she had learned the books of Scripture through, and had them “by heart” in more senses than one; and it in significant that, though the Holy Spirit was speaking by her, yet even he quoted the older Scriptures in preference to uttering new sentences. What honor he put upon the Old Testament by so continually quoting it in the New Testament, even as the Lord Jesus also did. Let us, too, prize every part of God’s Word, let us lie asoak in it till we are saturated with Scriptural expressions; we cannot find any better ones, for there are none.

51. *He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.*

Sometimes, we read of God’s “finger,” That refers to a part of his great power. At other times, we read of his “hand.” That is a more brilliant display of his

power. But here, as elsewhere, we read of his “arm.” This is the majesty of his omnipotence. Pharaoh’s magicians told the king that it was the finger of God that wrought the plagues of Egypt, but it was with his outstretched arm that he divided the Red Sea, and overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts: Mary felt that, in the work of salvation we see God’s arm; not merely his finger, or his hand.

52. *He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.*

This is what God is constantly doing—casting down the high and mighty ones, and lifting up the meek and lowly.

53. *He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.*

They who are self-satisfied shall sooner or later be cast out; but those who look to God alone, and are hungry after him, shall be satisfied with his favor.

54, 55. *He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever.*

This is one of the sweetest songs that was ever sung, and is equal to any of those which came from the inspired lips of the Hebrew prophets. Well might she sing who had been thus favored. Oh, if Christ Jesus should come to any of us by faith, what reason should we have for singing! And will not each one of us, who has been thus honored, cry with Mary, “My soul doth magnify the Lord”?

56. *And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.*

What wonderful interviews those two holy women had! The one well stricken in years, and the other youthful; yet both highly favored of God. I wonder what they said; doubtless angels remember their charming conversation. May the day come when all that fear the Lord, both men and women, shall speak often one to

another concerning their Redeemer, and all that relates to his glorious cause; and then the Lord shall write another Book of Remembrance concerning their hallowed fellowship and intercourse!

Luke 2

1–5. *And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the City of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.*

Little did any idea enter into Caesar's head that he was accomplishing the purpose of God by bringing Mary to Bethlehem, at that particular time, so that her child might be born there. But God can accomplish the purpose of his providence, and of his grace, in any way that he pleases and although Caesar is not aware of all that is involved in his action, hi; decree, which he intends simply to be a means of registering his subjects, and of filling his exchequer, is to be overruled by God for the fufilment of the prophecy, uttered centuries before the event happened, that Christ must be born at Bethlehem.

It may seem, to some of you, a strange thing that there should be an imperial edict, issued from Rome, which should have an important influence upon the place of birth of the Child; yet I do not doubt that, in God's esteem, the whole of the great Roman Empire was of very small account in comparison with his Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; and today, the thrones and dominions of the mightiest monarchs are only like the small cogs of the wheels of divine providence where the welfare of even the least of the Lord's people is concerned. He reckons not events according to their apparent importance; the standard of the sanctuary is a very different measure from that which worldlings use. When any purpose of God is to be accomplished, all other things will be subordinated to it.

6, 7. *And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.*

Now hath heavenly glory wedded earthly poverty; and, henceforth, let no man dare to despise the poor and needy, since the son of the Highest is born in a stable, and cradled in a manger. How low the King of glory stoops, and how gloriously he uplifts the lowly to share his glory!

8, 9. *And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.*

These men were probably poor and illiterate, but that did not hinder God from revealing himself to them, nor prevent the coming of his Son to them. They were engaged in their ordinary calling, “keeping watch over their flock by night,” when this great blessing came to them. Seldom does such a blessing as this come to idlers. It was not while they were gadding abroad, and wasting their time, but while they kept watch over their flock that “the angel of the Lord came upon them.” First one angel led the way, and then a multitude of the heavenly host followed and these poor men, perhaps troubled with the common superstition of the Jews that the appearance of God, or any supernatural visitation, would always be followed by death, “were sore afraid.”

10, 11. *And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.*

The anointed Savior has full power to save, for he “is Christ the Lord;” and therefore he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

12. *And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped*

in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

"This shall be a sign unto you," said the angel to the shepherds; and this is the ensign of the Christ of God even unto this day. There are some, who are constantly bringing discredit upon religion by their pompous ritual and gorgeous ceremonies, and it is buried beneath the weight of their sensuous worship, but the living Christ is still found in simple, lowly guise, "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

13. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying,*

They had heard the heavenly herald's proclamation, and hurried down to join him in publishing the glad tidings. They could not bear that only one angel should announce the birth of the Christ; so, "suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host"—

14–17. *And saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.*

Good news is not to be kept to ourselves. When we have ascertained its truth we are to tell it to others, and we are especially to tell the goodness of salvation. Tell it, O ye who know it in your own hearts by blessed experience! Tell it, though it will sometimes be with broken accents in the feebleness of your flesh yet even then tell it in the ardor of your heart's affection, and God will bless your testimony, and others will learn the good news through you.

18, 19. *And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and*

pondered them

Weighed them, estimated them at their right value,—

in her heart.

The best of coffers to lay up anything in is the heart. Happy are those who, like Mary, store up the things of Christ, not in their brain though that would make them orthodox; but in their heart, for that will bring them salvation.

20, 21. *And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*

Although the old law ends with Christ, it is very instructive to notice that he came under the law, and conformed to all its appointments. Jesus, therefore, had to be circumcised. In him the law was fulfilled in every point, even to the jots and tittles; nothing was omitted. Behold, how perfect is the righteousness which he wrought out for his people!

22. *And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;*

Everything was done that was required by the Jewish law, you see. “When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” “Being found in fashion as a man,” and a man under the Jewish law, Jesus and his parents were obedient to all its requirements.

23, 24. *(As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) and to offer a sacrifice*

according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons.

This proves the poverty of our Lord's parents. If they had been able to bring a costlier sacrifice, they should have done so. The law required the offering of a lamb for a burnt offering; but there was a gracious provision in the case of the poor mother: "If she be not able to bring a lamb, then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean." Even in the case of a working-woman, the birth of her first-born son required from her a sacrifice; but it might be of the smallest kind: "A pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons." Think of your Lord himself redeemed by a sacrifice, a pair of doves offered in his stead! What a wonderful coming down to our condition and position was this!

25, 26. *And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout.*

This combination makes up a complete character, "just" towards man, "devout" towards God. There are many who think they are just, but their justness does not extend to their fellow-creatures, and they forget the claims of the Most High upon them. On the other hand, I have known men who have pretended to a vast amount of devotion, but who have never been just. Such persons are hypocrites, as the others are robbers of God; but he who is just and devout, just towards man and devout towards God, hath the character of a true man. Such was Simeon, "just and devout."

waiting for the consolation of Israel:

His devotion was not that of a blind devotee. He had eyes of expectation, he was expecting the Messiah to come, who is "the consolation of Israel."

and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

That which the Holy Ghost reveals will assuredly come to pass, as it did in the experience of old Simeon.

27-29. *And he came by the Spirit into the temple:*

Men who have the Spirit will be led by the Spirit. Simeon came into the temple at the right moment. Just when a young man was entering, with his wife and new-born child, “He came by the Spirit into the temple.”

and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:

You see, dear friends, he was not afraid to die, and he knew that he could not die until he had seen the Messiah. Some of us, if we had a revelation that, on the occurrence of a certain event, we should die, might be filled with alarm or anxiety, but it is not so with holy Simeon; he rather longs to depart in peace. He looks upon the coming of “the Lord’s Christ” with great joy, because now he knows the battle of life for him will soon be over, and that he will enter into his victory.

30–32. *For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people Israel.*

Simeon had studied the ancient prophecies to good purpose, and he perceived from them that “the Lord’s Christ” would be “a light to lighten the Gentiles” as well as “the glory of” God’s ancient people, “Israel.”

33. *And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.*

We may be very near to Christ, and yet know very little about him. Joseph and

the virgin mother did not understand “those things which were spoken of him.” One wonders it was so after all that had been revealed to them; we marvel that they marvelled.

34. *And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel,*

There were many who fell through their offenses against Jesus: but blessed be his name, there are still many who rise through him, rise first to newness of life on earth and afterwards to resurrection life in glory. Jesus is set for both, he must be to one the savor of death unto death, and to another he must be the savor of life unto life.

and for a sign which shall be spoken against;

How true has this been. The cross has been to many a stumbling block, and to the worldly wise it has been foolishness; and so will it be to the world’s end.

35. *(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also.)*

Great privileges often involve great troubles. Mary was highly favored, and truly blessed among women, yet no woman ever had greater sorrow than she had.

That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Christ’s death revealed the thoughts of many hearts. It revealed the thought in the heart of Pilate, that he loved popularity better than the truth. It revealed the thought of the heart of Judas, that he loved gold better than he loved his Master. It revealed the thought in the heart of Caiaphas, that he would keep to old customs rather than to the right. It revealed the thought in the hearts of the disciples, and showed what poor timid, trembling hearts they had. Peter’s impulsive spirit, too, was revealed in all its weakness by the death of the Savior. The cross is the great touchstone; wherever it comes, it tests and tries us—even as the crucible tries the metal that is put into it—and lets us know what manner of men we are.

Dost thou love Christ? Dost thou glory in his cross? Then it is well with thee. But dost thou despise the cross? Dost thou set up thine own righteousness in opposition to it? Art thou depending upon anything beside Jesus Christ and him crucified? Then his cross reveals thee to be self-righteous, and dead in trespasses and sins.

Our Savior was not only to be received by men, but he was to be welcomed by women also, so now we read:

36, 37. *And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*

It would have been a pity for Christ to have been received in the temple only by a man. There must be a woman there, too, to join in Simeon's swan song, and to unite her testimony with his.

38. *And she coming in that instant*

God knows how to time what we call our accidental walks: "She coming in that instant".

gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

So that the song of Simeon was sweetened by the voice of Anna, and they both rejoiced in God their Savior; and their joy was shared by "all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." May many of us have a share in that same joy as, by faith, we lovingly gaze upon "the Lord's Christ."

Luke 3

1, 2. *Now in the fifteenth yea of the reign of Tiberias Caesar, Pontias Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.*

John came not to the court, but to lone wildernesses: places left to sheep and a handful of rural folk. The mission of Christ Jesus is to the moral wastes and to the desolate places of the earth.

3. *And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;*

The people were expecting a Messiah, and so they went en masse to John as soon as his shrill voice had startled the solitudes. Baptism, or the washing of the body in water, most fitly accompanied the cry, “Repent ye.” Apart from the acknowledgment of guilt, it would have been a mere bathing of the person without spiritual significance; but the confession which went with it made it an instructive sign. John must have inwardly wondered to see the multitudes come; but his chief thought ran forward to his coming Lord.

4-6. *As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all*

flesh shall see the salvation of God.

The prophets not only described the King, but his forerunner also. They mention the character of this harbinger: he was a “voice”; (Jesus is “the Word”); his tone, “crying”; his place, “in the wilderness”; and his message, which was one of announcement, in which he required preparation for the coming king: “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”

Men’s hearts were like a wilderness, wherein there is no way; but as loyal subjects throw up roads for the approach of beloved princes, so were men to welcome the Lord, with their hearts made right and ready to receive him.

7. *Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned ye to flee from the wrath to come?*

Does not John the Baptist speak like Elijah? Here are no honeyed phrases to delight the popular ear. The prophet of the wilderness talks like one who is all on fire with zeal for God, and indignation against evil. John addressed them with scorching words. He saw that they, were serpentine in their motives and viperish in their tempers, and so he calls them “generation of vipers”: thus would he see whether they were sincere or not. He asks who suggested to them to flee from that wrath of which he was the forerunner, according to the closing words of the Old Testament. This enquiry was not complimentary; but it is no business of the Lord’s servants to make themselves pleasing: they must be faithful, and especially so to the great and learned. Thus faithful was John the Baptist, and he was honored for it by him that sent him

8. *Bring forth therefore worthy of repentance,*

Act as a change of mind would lead you to do: above all, quit the pride in which you enwrap yourselves, and leave the serpent motives which now actuate you. Lord, save us from a fruitless repentance, which would be only an aggravation of our previous sins.

and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our

father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.

Do not imagine that God needs you in order to fulfill his promise to his servant Abraham; for he can make each stone in Jordan into an heir of grace. Do not presume upon your ancestry, and think that all the blessings of the coming kingdom must be yours because you are of the seed of the father of the faithful. God can as easily make sons of stones as of a generation of vipers. He will never be short of means for fulfilling his covenant, without bowing his gospel before the caprice of vainglorious men. He will find a people in the slums if his gospel is rejected by the respectable. Let none of us, because we are orthodox, or exceedingly Scriptural in our religious observances, dream that we must therefore be in the favor of God, and that we are under no necessity to repent. God can do without us; but we cannot do without repentance and the works which prove it true. What a blessing that he can transform hearts of stone into filial spirits! Wonders of grace to God belong!

9. *And now also there is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*

He means, the King is come: the Cutter-down of every fruitless tree has arrived. The Great Woodman has thrown down his axe at “the root of the trees.” He lifts the axe; he strikes; the fruitless tree is felled; it is cast into the fire. The sketch is full of life. The Baptizer sees forests falling beneath the axe; for he whom he heralds will be the Judge of men, and the Executioner of righteousness. What an announcement he had to make! What a scene his believing eye beheld! Our vision is much the same: the axe is still at work. Lord, cut me not down for the fire. I know that the absence of good fruit is as fatal as the presence of corrupt fruit: Lord, let me not be a mere negative, lest I be “hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

10, 11. *And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.*

John was wonderfully practical in his advocacy of a holy charity and benevolence. His words cut against all greed, all hoarding, all hardening of the heart towards our fellow men.

12, 13. *Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.*

They were accustomed to gather the taxes unfairly, and to increase the rates by oppressing the people, getting, perhaps, twice or even ten times more out of them than they could legally claim. John speaks to the point, does he not?

14. *And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do And he said unto them, Do violence to no man,*

Those rough Roman soldiers, as they had conquered the country, were very apt to treat the people as though they were their slaves; so John says to them, "Do violence to no man,—

neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

"With your rations, your allowances," so it runs. They were very apt to be contending for an increase in their pay, and to drag civilians before the courts with false accusations unless they chose to give them bribes to let them go. John does not mince matters with any of his hearers; he speaks with wonderful plainness and courage, and therein proves himself to be a true herald of his Master.

15, 16. *And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not; John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire:*

John could plunge the penitent into water; but a greater than he must baptize men into the Holy Ghost and into fire. Repentance is well attended by washing in water; but the true baptism of the believer by the Lord Jesus himself brings us into spiritual floods of holy fire. John considered himself to be nothing more than a household slave, unworthy of the office of removing his Master's sandals; and his baptism in water was as much inferior to the Spirit-baptism as a slave to his lord. Jesus is the divine Lord who covers us with the fiery influences of the Holy Spirit. Do we know this baptism? What is water-baptism without it? What are all the Johns in the world, with their baptisms in water, when compared with Jesus and his baptism into fire!

17, 18. *Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable. And many other things in his exhortation preached he unto the people.*

He sets forth his Lord under another figure; that of a Husbandman. This time he holds in his hand, not the axe, but the winnowing shovel. Pharisees, Sadducees, and all the rest, lie on his floor: it is with them he deals: "He will thoroughly purge his floor." If they do not wish to be purified by him, they should not be there: but there they are, and he deals with them. His fan is in his hand: he throws up the heap to the breeze, that he may test and divide. His wheat he gathers; for this he seeks. The chafer is blown further off to the place where a fire is burning, and so it is consumed out of the way by what he tells us is unquenchable fire. Our Lord's teaching would act like a great winnowing fan, leaving the true by themselves, and driving off the false and worthless to utter destruction. It was so in the life of our Lord; it is so every day where he is preached. He is the Great Divider. It is his Word which separates the sinners from the saints, and gathers out a people for himself.

19, 20. *But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.*

Of course it was not lawful for him to take to himself his brother Philip's wife while Philip was yet living, and while his own wife was living also. While he

was the guest of Philip at home, he became ensnared by Herodias; and the guilty pair, who in addition to their being already wedded, were by birth too near of kin for lawful marriage, came back to Galilee as if they were man and wife. It was bravely spoken of the Baptist when he bluntly said, “It is not lawful for thee to have her”; but the sentence cost him dear. Herod Antipas could bear to do the deed, but he could not bear to be told that he had committed an unlawful act. John did not mince matters, or leave the question alone. What was a king to him if that king dared to trample on the law of God? He spoke out pointedly, and Herod knew that he did so.

21. *Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized,*

In due time, when all was prepared, the Prince quitted his obscurity. Putting himself in a lowly place, he did not summon the Baptizer to come to the Lake of Galilee, but went down the country along the banks of the Jordan to him, seeking baptism. Baptism was becoming even in our Lord, who needed no personal purification; for he was the Head over all things to his Church, and it was becoming that he should be as the members should be. Baptism beautifully sets forth our Lord’s immersion in suffering, his burial, and his resurrection.

and praying, the heaven was opened,

Our Lord Jesus had now to enter on his public life-work, and he did so in the best manner. The world was opening before him, “and the heaven was opened” unto him. As his need appeared, his source of supply was set open before him.

22. *And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.*

Like a swift-winged, pure, and quiet dove, the Holy Ghost came, and found a resting-place in him. When he had been immersed into the element of water, he was immediately surrounded by the divine element of the Spirit. Then, also, was his ear charmed with the Father’s audible acknowledgment of him, and with the expression of that good pleasure which the Lord God had always felt in him. It

was a glorious moment. Our King was now proclaimed and anointed.

In Baptism, our Lord was openly attested and sealed as the “beloved Son “, both by the Word of God, and the Spirit of God. What more witness is needed? It is often so with his people: their sonship is made clear during an act of obedience, and the Word and the Spirit bear witness with their consciences.

23-30. *And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Amos, which was the son of Naum, which was the son of Esli, which was the son of Nagge, which was the son of Maath, which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Semei, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joanna, which was the son of Rhesa, which was the son of Zorobabel, which was the son of Salathiel, which was the son of Neri, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Addi, which was the son of Cosam, which was the son of Elmodam, which was the son of Er, which was the son of Jose, which was the son of Eliezer, which was the son of Jorim, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Simeon, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Jonan, which was the son of Eliakim, which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha, which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David, which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Boaz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson, which was the son of Aminadab, which was the son of Aram, which was the son of Esrom, which was the son of Phares, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Jacob, which was the son of Isaac, which was the son of Abraham, which was the son of Thara, which was the son of Nachor, which was the son of Saruch, which was the son of Ragau, which was the son of Phalec, which was the son of*

Heber, which was the son of Sala, which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech, which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, which was the son of Jared, which was the son of Maleleel, which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.

The portion before us looks like a string of names, and we might fancy that it would yield us little spiritual food; but we may not think lightly of any line of the inspired volume. Here the Spirit sets before us the pedigree of Jesus, and sketches the family tree of “the King of the Jews.” Marvelous condescension, that he should be a man, and have a genealogy, even HE who “was in the beginning with God”, and “thought it not robbery to be equal with God”!

With one or two exceptions these are names of persons of little or no note. The later ones were persons altogether obscure and insignificant. Our Lord was “a root out of dry ground”; a shoot from the withered stem of Jesse. He set small store by earthly greatness. He must needs be of human race; but he comes to a family which was of low estate, and there finds his reputed father, Joseph, a carpenter of Nazareth. He is the poor man’s King. He will not disdain any of us though our father’s house be little in Israel. He will condescend to men of low estate.

Luke 4

1. *And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,*

“Full of the Holy Ghost,” and then led “into the wilderness” to be tempted. You would not expect that. Yet it is a sadder thing to be led into a wilderness when you are not filled with the Spirit, and a sadder thing to be tempted when the Spirit of God is not resting upon you. The temptation of our Lord was not one to which he wantonly exposed himself, he “was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.” The Spirit of God may lead us where we shall have to endure trial. If he does so, we are safe; and we shall come off conquerors even as our Master did.

2. *Being forty days tempted of the devil.*

Six weeks of temptation. We read the story of the temptation, perhaps, in six minutes; but it lasted for nearly six weeks Forty days tempted of the devil.”

And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.

It does not appear, therefore, that Jesus hungered while he was fasting. He was miraculously sustained during that period. After fasting, one looks for deeper spiritual feeling, and more holy joy; but the most prominent fact here is that “he afterward hungered,” Think not that you have lost the benefit of your devout exercises when you do not at once feel it. Perhaps the very best thing that can happen to you, after much prayer, is a holy hunger; I mean not a natural hunger, as it was with our Lord; but a blessed hungering after divine things. “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

3. *And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.*

Satan met the hungry Man, and suited his temptation to his present pangs, to his special weakness at that moment: “If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.” The devil suspected, and I think he knew that Jesus was the Son of God; but he began his temptation with an “if.” He hissed that into the Savior’s ear: “If thou be the Son of God.”

If you, believer, can be led to doubt your sonship, and to fear that you are not a son of God, Satan will have begun to will the battle. So he begins to storm the fort royal of faith: “If thou be the Son of God.” Our Lord was the Son of God, but he was then suffering as our Substitute; and in that condition he was a lone and humble man; what if I call him “a common soldier in the ranks”? Satan invites him to work a miracle of ail improper kind on his own behalf; but Jesus wrought no miracle for himself. Now, it may be, that the devil is trying some of you tonight. You are very poor, or business is going very awkwardly, and Satan suggests that you should help yourself in an improper manner. He tells you that you can get out of your trouble very easily by some action which, although it may not be strictly right, may not be so very wrong after all. He said to Jesus, “If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.”

4. *And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written,*

That is Christ’s sword. See how swiftly he drew it out of its sheath. What a sharp two-edged sword is this to be used against Satan! You also, believer, have this powerful weapon in your hand; let no man take it from you.

Believe in the inspiration of Scripture. Just now there is a fierce attack upon the Book of Deuteronomy. It is a very curious thing that all the texts Christ used during the temptation were taken out of Deuteronomy, as if that was to be the very armoury out of which he would select this true Jerusalem blade, with which he should overcome the tempter, “It is written,” “It is written,” “It is said.”

that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

“God can sustain me without my turning the stone into bread. God can bring me

through my trouble without my saying or doing anything wrong I am not dependent upon the outward and visible." If you can feel like that, if you can appropriate the promise of God, and quote it to Satan, saying,

"It is written," Using it as Christ did, you will come off conqueror in the time of temptation even as he did.

5. *And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.*

Sceptics have asked how that could be done. Well, they had better ask him who did it. He knows more about them, and they know more about him, than I do; but be did it: I am sure, for here it is written, that he "shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time."

6, 7. *And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore, wilt worship me, all shall be thine.*

Wretched traitor! None of these kingdoms were really his own; they were in truth the rightful heritage of the Lord to whom he pretended he could give them. How he opened his mouth and said, "All these things will I give thee"! A poor all after all; and it would only have been a stolen gift had he bestowed it. Yet it would have been to any of us a very dazzling and fascinating sight; for the glories of even one kingdom make hearts beat, and eyes glisten, and feet slip. The bait is sweet, but the hook lies under it. The glittering glory would be bought too dear by that demand —"fall down and worship me."

If Jesus would have adopted carnal means, he would soon have had "the kingdoms of the world" at his feet. A little tampering with truth, and a little flattery of prejudice, and he might have had many men around him, irresistible in their fanaticism. By their enthusiastic efforts he would soon have been able to wield a mighty power, before which Rome would have fallen. Our holy Lord disdained to use the help of evil, though the master of wickedness promised him success. How could he bow down before the devil? It was the height of impudence for the false fiend to invite worship from the perfect One. Christ at the devil's feet! It reminds us of religion supported by theatricals and raffles.

What gift of the foul fiend could tempt the Son of God to be the servant of evil? The tempter does not dare to mention Sonship in this case; for that would have laid the blasphemous suggestion too bare. No son of God can worship the devil.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan:

The temptation annoyed him, it was so foreign to his holy nature, it vexed his gracious spirit, so he cried out indignantly to the tempter: “Get thee behind me, Satan.”

8. *For it is written,*

Here flashed forth the sword again.

Thou, shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Then let us pay no reverence, no worship, to any but God. Consciences and minds are made for God alone; before him let us bow; but if all the world were proffered us for a moment’s idolatry, let us not fall into the snare of the tempter.

9. *And he brought him to Jerusalem, And set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence:*

The place was cunningly chosen; temple-pinnacles are not safe standing; high and holy places are open to temptation. The posture was advantageous to the tempter, for nature feels a tendency to fall when set “on a pinnacle.” The aim of the fiery dart was at our Lord’s Sonship: “If thou be the Son of God.” If the enemy could have hurt our Lord’s filial confidence, he would have gained his design.

10, 11. *For it is written,*

Satan borrowed our Lord’s weapon, and said, “It is written”; but he did not use

the sword lawfully. It was not in the nature of the false fiend to quote correctly. He left out the necessary words, “in all thy ways”: thus he made the promise say what in truth it never suggested, and then boldly prescribed a course which the law of God would condemn, saying, “Cast thyself down.” We are to be kept in our ways, but not in our follies. The omission of a word may spoil the meaning of a Scripture; verbal inspiration makes accurate quotation to be a duty, as the omission of a word or two entirely alters the sense. What reliable inspiration can there be except that which suggests words as well as ideas?

He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Hear how the devil talks about angels, their Lord, their charge, their care, and their diligence: a man may handle holy subjects with great familiarity, and yet be himself unholy. It is ill to talk of angels, and yet to act like devils.

12. *And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

How short and decisive was the stroke of our Lord upon the great enemy! He meets a falsely-quoted promise with a plain precept, forbidding us to presume. “Thou shalt not” from the mouth of God is the shield of conscience against a foul temptation. Our rule of action is neither a promise nor a providence; but the clear command of the Lord. Presumption is a tempting of God; and to “tempt the Lord” is not to be thought of for a moment. Remember, believer, he is “thy God”, to be trusted, not to be tempted.

13. *And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.*

The enemy left him when he had shot his last bolt; but even then he left him only for a season, minding to return at the first opportunity. Only when he has tried his utmost will the tempter let a child of God alone, and even then he will watch for another opportunity.

14, 15. *And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee:*

Ah, dear brethren, if our Lord Jesus needed “the power of the Spirit”, how much more do you and I need it! We have no power of our own, but he was the Son of God. He was a divine Teacher, and yet, when he went to his work, it was “in the power of the Spirit.” Tarry, brother, till you have that power; it is of no use for you to go without it.

And there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

There was a wondrous power about his teaching: “Never man spake like this man.” Perhaps his hearers did not understand what the power was; but they glorified the new Teacher who had come into their midst.

16. *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up:*

It is always a difficult thing for a young man to begin preaching in His own native town. A prophet is not without honor save in his own country, yet Jesus “came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.”

and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

It was the custom to read parts of Holy Writ in the synagogue, and then to say a few words by way of exposition; and this the Savior did.

17. *And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Isaiah.*

And when he had opened the book, that is, unrolled the parchment containing Isaiah’s prophecy—

17. *He found the place where it was written,*

You will find the passage in the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah.

18, 19. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.*

There he stopped; it was all of the passage that then seemed suitable.

20. *And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down.*

In those days, the preacher sat down, and those who listened stood up, I daresay that practice tended to keep the hearers awake, and it was all the easier for the speaker. Well might the Savior sit down, weighted as he was with a burden of holy instruction that he was about to impart to the people; or, perhaps, sitting down as if himself at rest, he appeared the more ready to give rest to them also.

And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

The young Nazarene, who had quitted them for a while, and had come home again, was the center of his fellow-townsmen’s attention.

21. *And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.*

That is the way to preach; bring home the Scripture to the present time, show its application to every-day life, especially point out its connection with Christ, and prove how it is fulfilled and verified in his sacred person.

Doubtless, Jesus said a great deal besides what is here recorded; but there were no shorthand writers there to take down every word he uttered.

21. *And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.*

He thus declared that he was the anointed Messiah.

22. *And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious word which proceeded out of his mouth.*

They did not at first cavil at or deny what Jesus said; his doctrine was pleasing and comforting; and they were ready to accept it.

And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

There! Did it matter whose son Jesus was? Yet, in order to abate the force and even the blessedness of divine truth, men turn their thoughts to the Speaker rather than to what he says. How foolish!

23. *And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me the proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.*

"You have been doing great things over yonder at Capernaum, do the same at Nazareth. You should not leave your own native town without working miracles here." Now there was an opportunity for Jesus to ingratiate himself with the people, and win their good word. If he would only perform miracles among them, he should be highly exalted in their esteem.

24, 25. *And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the day, of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;*

Many husbands died, and many widows in Israel were left desolate in those terrible days of trial.

26. *But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow.*

This was as much as to say, “It is not because I lived here that I shall work miracles in this place. There were many widows round about Elijah, but he was not sent to one of them, he was sent to a widow in Sarepta, a city of Sidon, a heathen woman in another country.” Mark the sovereignty of God; he bestows his mercy where he wills, according to his declaration to Moses, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” We dare not ask God why he does this, “for he giveth not account of any of his matters.” He acts wisely; but he acts according to the good pleasure of his own will.

27. *And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman; the Syrian.*

He, too, was a heathen from a distant country. Healing came unto him, but unto none of the lepers of Israel. God will do as he pleases with his own mercy and grace. The question that he asks is, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? “This doctrine of divine sovereignty was not according to the taste of these people, they did not like it, and some of you, I fear, do not like it. They grew very angry, they began to gnash their teeth, and to say, “This young man must be silenced; we will not listen to such doctrine as this from him.”

28. *And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,*

They were at first very pleased to have a promising young Preacher out of their own town, and they said one to another, “Did not he speak well?” Now they have changed their note; be has been too faithful for them. He has exalted God instead of man; and now they are filled with wrath.

29, 30. *And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them went*

his way,

They could not destroy him at that time. His work was not done, and he was immortal till it was fully accomplished. With that holy calm in which he always dwelt, with wondrous self-possession, he passed through the midst of them, and escaped their malice.

31, 32. *And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.*

"They were astonished": was this all? It is to be feared it was. Two things surprised them; the substance of his teaching, and the manner of it. They had never heard such doctrine before; the precepts which he had given were quite new to their thoughts. But their main astonishment was at his manner: there was a certainly a power, a weight about it, such as they had never seen in the ordinary professional instructors. He did not raise questions, nor speak with hesitation; neither did he cite authorities, and hide his own responsibility behind great names. He spoke royally: the truth itself was its own argument and demonstration. He taught prophetically, as one inspired from above: men felt that he spake after the manner of one sent of God. It was no fault on their part to be astonished, but it was a grave crime to be astonished and nothing more.

33, 34. *And in the synagogue there was a man, which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?*

There are many people, at the present day, who have this evil spirit in them and they also say, "Let us alone." They do not want to have their consciences disturbed; they would rather sleep on until they wake up in another world where their awaking will be too late to avail for their repentance.

Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.

That is an old trick of the devil, to acknowledge the excellence of the Preacher that he may avoid the personal application of the sermon; and there are many people, who are quite satisfied when they have said concerning the Word which they have heard, “Yes, it was all true, and it was very well put.” But that is not the purpose of a true minister of the gospel—simply to win the compliment of your approbation; he wants to see the devil cast out of you, and to stir up your hearts so that you will no longer let religion alone, but will flee to Christ to save you.

35, 36. *And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.*

Ah, dear friends! when we see what the gospel can do—how it can reclaim the thief, how it can make chaste the harlot, how it can lift up the very vilest of men from the lowest depths of degradation—we may well say, “What a Word is this!” The power of the gospel does not lie in the preacher, but in the truth which he proclaims. What a Word is this, which not only knocks at the door of the human heart, but which carries on its girdle the key with which it can open that door? It does not simply invite the sinner to trust the Savior, but there is a power, which goes with it, which sweetly woos the heart until the unwilling become willing, and those who have hitherto despised God and his great salvation, cheerfully yield themselves to him. Christ not only comes to those who seek him; but, in the splendor of his grace, he is often found of them that sought him not; yea, those who cried “Let us alone,” are not let alone, for grace brings them beneath her blessed sway.

37-39. *And the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about. And he arose out of the synagogue and entered into Simon’s house. And Simon’s wife’s mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought him for her. And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them.*

Here is a type of another form of the disease of sin. This time it is a hot and burning fever, and there are many men who have the fever of pride, or the fever of ambition, and some who have the fever of impetuous lust. Yet we have never read of such a cure as this in the lives of the doctors of ancient or modern times. They have wrought remarkable cures by long dosing the patient with various drugs, but Christ just stood over Peter's wife's mother, and rebuked the fever, and instantly it fled.

40. *Now when the sun was setting,*

Ah, it is setting with some of you! Those grey hairs are like the streaks of light upon the horizon as the sun goes down; but blessed be God, he who heals the spiritually sick in the early morning, by bringing children to himself, does not cease to work until the sun goes down.

All they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them.

Oh, that he would do that just now! Still is he mighty to save; oh, that he would now display his ancient power, and lay his healing hands on every one of you! What fame he would get if he would do so! What joy there would be if all of you should now be turned to God! And why should it not be? Christ is able to do this; then, let us ask it of him in earnest believing prayer

41. *And devils also came out of many, crying out, and, saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.*

Perhaps they thought that their testimony would tend to blacken his character. We are, in a sense, pleased when bad men find fault with us, for that is really the best commendation that they can give us; but when they begin to praise us, we feel suspicious that there is something wrong. We think of how Christ acted when the devils said to him, "Thou art Christ, the Son of God," and we would fain have them hold their tongues. What a vile thing sin is, for it makes even good words to be evil when they come out of sinful lips!

42-44. *And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place: and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed him, that he should not depart from them. And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.*

Our Lord was ever on the move: he went about all Galilee. The Great Itinerant made a province his parish. He preached “in their synagogues”, but he was equally at home in their streets: he cared nothing for consecrated places.

Luke 5

1, 2. *And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennasaret, and saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets.*

Before folding them up, as if they intended to do no more with them just then, as they had been working all night in vain.

3. *And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land.*

It is very difficult to speak effectively when the people come too close to the speaker; and, sometimes, a little inconvenience like that may interfere with the flow of the speaker's thoughts and words. Even the Savior seems to have felt that he needed a little breathing space between himself and his audience.

And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

That was what some people would have called an unconsecrated place, but Christ's presence consecrated it, as it does every place where he condescends to meet with us.

"Where're we seek him, he is found,
And every place is hallowed ground."

4. *Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.*

Whenever he borrows a pulpit, or anything else, he pays good interest for the loan. Christ will not be in even a boatman's debt. For every cup of cold water given to his disciples in his name the Master will take care to pay.

5. *And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.*

Out of personal respect and obedience to Christ, having perhaps but a slender hope of any good coming of it, yet, nevertheless, he will let down the net.

6, 7. *And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them.*

For they had launched out so far into the sea so scarcely to be within hearing, so they beckoned to their partners in the other ship, and they rowed out to them.

And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

We can have too much of a good thing, aye, too much even of the best things, for our poor frail vessel cannot hold all that God would be willing to put into it.

8. *When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*

Not knowing what he said, though he knew what he meant; feeling as if he, so sinful, had come too close to the Lord who was so gracious, so he must not dare to keep near to him. Have you never felt the same as that? If not, methinks you have neither known your Lord, not yet yourselves for the knowledge of Christ, combined with the knowledge of ourselves, is sure to produce this holy shrinking, in which we have no need for anyone to say to us, "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet," for we are almost ready to put off our very body, for we can scarcely bear the glory of the presence of the Lord.

9, 10. *For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.*

He seemed to imply that he should catch them after the same rate, too; and so he did, for the first throw of the net brought in three thousand, and very soon the number caught was increased to five thousand. That was good fishing by those first Gospel fishermen; oh, that we could throw the net as they did!

11, 12. *And when they had brought the ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him, and it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy:*

That is a characteristic touch of Luke, who, as a physician, with a glance of his eye, took in the condition of the man, not as merely a leper, but as one "full of leprosy."

12. *Who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and brought him, saying, Lord if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.*

He felt that the difficulty lay in the will of Christ, not in his power. No other teacher would have looked at such a man. Everybody shrank from him, for he scattered defilement wherever he moved. A leper was a being from whom all kept clear, so this one was afraid that the great Teacher was not willing to cure him. "If thou wilt," said he, "thou canst—I know that thou canst make me clean."

13. *And he put forth his hand, and touched him*

The perfectly pure One touched the leprous man without himself becoming contaminated. In any other house, the man who touched a leper would have been defiled; but, when Christ comes into contact with impurity, he is not defiled, but he removes it. This is what the gospel is meant to do to the world. We are to go

and seek the good of the most fallen and abandoned of men and those who do so, ought to have so much of the spirit of Jesus Christ in them, and so much vitality in their piety, that they will not be tempted by the sin upon which they look, but, on the contrary, will overcome that sin, and impart spiritual health instead of receiving infection. May we be in such a state of health as Jesus was! Then shall we be able to touch the leper, and not be defiled. Jesus touched him—

Saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.

Ask him to touch thee also, poor leprous soul; thou who art full of sin, thou who art deeply conscious that the deadly disease of sin is upon thee incurably. Ask him but to touch thee, for the touch of his finger shall make thee clean in a moment. Christ's cures are often instantaneous. He, who could speak a world into being with a word, can also speak a man into perfect spiritual sanity with a word.

14. *And he charged him to fell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.*

As long as the ceremonial law was in force, Christ very diligently obeyed it, and bade others do the same. That law is now abolished, and the Jewish priesthood has also ceased to be. But mark the modesty of our Savior. As a man, he sought no fame or honor, but, as far as he could do so, he suppressed the voices that would have brought him notoriety; yet grateful tongues could not all be silenced, even at his bidding.

15. *But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.*

There was a double attraction about the Lord Jesus—his sweet, instructive speech, and his gracious, healing hand There is a somewhat similar attraction still in every true gospel ministry, not the attraction of the mere words of human

eloquence, but in the truth which every faithful minister preaches, and in that matchless soul-healing power which goes with the Word wherever it is believingly heard.

16. *And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.*

That is just what you and I would probably not have done under such circumstances. We should have said, “We must seize this golden opportunity of publishing our message. There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at the flood, leads on to plenitude of blessing; and we must take advantage of it.” But our Savior did not wish for fame, he cared nothing about excitement and popularity; so “he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed” for more of that real power which touches the hearts of men so as to save them, caring nothing for that power which merely attracts a crowd, and excites momentary attention. O servant of God, when thou art succeeding best in thy service, imitate thy Lord, withdraw thyself and pray!

17. *And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them.*

Not the Pharisees and doctors of the law; they do not often get healed by Christ, but “the power of the Lord was present to heal the multitude.” The only people for whom there seems to be no power to heal are these Pharisees and doctors, as will appear by the following narrative.

18, 19. *And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus.*

There does appear to have been, according to Mark, some breaking up of the

material that formed the roof of the house where Christ was. It was not altogether such an easy matter as some have imagined to let this poor palsied man down into the presence of Jesus; and if some of the dust from the roof fell down upon the Pharisees and doctors of the law who were sitting by, it would only be what they were accustomed to throw into other people's eyes.

20. *And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.*

Christ has eyes with which he can see faith. You and I cannot see it; but he can: "When he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins be forgiven thee." This was going to the very root of his disease. Jesus knew what the man really ailed; he was palsied in spirit as well as in body, and Christ removed the root of his disease by forgiving his sin.

21. *And the scribes and the Pharisees*

Here they are, these caviling gentlemen, these Pharisees and doctors of the law —

began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

Most true, O Pharisees; and, therefore he is God, for he can forgive sins, and he has forgiven this poor sinner!

22, 23. *But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?*

Anyone can say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," or, "Rise up and walk," but to forgive sins, or to give the power to rise up and walk, equally needs a God. If God be present, and can make the palsied man arise and walk, he is also able to forgive his sins.

24–26. *But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear,*

With awe, and reverence. They felt that God had come very near to them, and they perhaps said, like Jacob of old, when he was afraid, "flow dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." They were filled with fear,—

saying, we have seen strange things today.

May we often see such "strange things" spiritually!

27. *And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom:*

This Levi, or Matthew, was a tax collector; not like those of our own clay, but one who farmed the taxes for the Roman governor, and made what he could for himself out of them; at least, that is what many of the "publicans" did.

And he said unto him, Follow me.

Two words sufficed for his conversion and obedience: "Follow me."

28. *And he left all, rose up, and followed him.*

This was just a parallel case to that of curing the palsied man; it is precisely the same morally as the other was physically. The office of a publican was disreputable in the eyes of the Jews, and this Levi was probably making money fast at the cost of his own countrymen. He was paralyzed morally as the other man was physically; but as soon as Christ said to him, "Follow me," "he left all,

rose up, and followed him."

29, 30. *And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?*

It seems that there can never be a great wonder wrought by Christ without somebody or other objecting to it. I suppose that the sun never rose without annoying thieves, who would like a longer time to perpetrate their deeds of darkness; and no miracle of mercy is ever wrought without somebody finding fault with it for some reason or other. Be not dismayed, therefore, now that in these modern days there have arisen many cunning objectors to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let them object to it, as the dog barks at the moon; but still the moon shines on in her silver brightness. So, when all objectors shall have howled themselves to silence, the eternal gospel will shine on with never-failing splendor.

These scribes and Pharisees murmured against Christ's disciples, and said to them, "Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" Their Master did not leave there to defend themselves, but he took the case into his own hands.

31. *And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.*

"You regard them as sick, and I regard them in the same way, and therefore am I found where these sick ones are. Why should I turn aside from them to insult you, who are so wonderfully healthy and think yourselves so good?"

32. *I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

The murmuring of those Pharisees and doctors of the law had one good result, for it led the Savior to declare the purpose of his mission to the earth: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

33. *And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?*

Here our Lord answered the second part of their enquiry; the first part they must answer on their own account. Why his disciples did not fast he proceeds to explain. He is “the Bridegroom” who came to woo and win his bride; those who followed him were the guests, the Bridegroom’s best men and attendants; it was for them to rejoice while the Bridegroom headed their company; for sorrow is not suitable for wedding-feasts. Our Lord is that Bridegroom of whom Solomon sang in the Song of songs, and we who enjoy his fellowship are one with him in his joy. Why should we fast while he is near? Can we allow little things to kill our great joy? Can we, in consistency with reason, and in harmony with respect for our Lord, mourn as long as the Bridegroom is with us?

35. *But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.*

But Jesus was to go. He says himself, “The Bridegroom shall be taken from them.” Here first he speaks about his death. Did his disciples note the warning word? When their Beloved was gone, they would have fasting enough. How true was this! Sorrows crowded in upon them when he was gone. It is the same with us. Our Lord is our joy: his presence makes our banquet; his absence is our fast, black and bitter. All Ritualistic fasting is the husk: the reality of fasting is known only to the child of the bridechamber when his Lord is no more with him. This is fasting indeed, as some of us know full well.

There is no wedding without a Bridegroom, no delight without Jesus. In his presence is fullness of joy; in his absence is depth of misery. Let but the heart rest in his love and it desireth nothing more. Take away a sense of his love from the soul, and it is dark, empty, and nigh unto death.

36. *And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the*

old.

Jesus came not to repair Israel's worn vesture, but to bring new robes. Even if a mere mending had been aimed at, it could not have been effected through his disciples copying old ways. New cloth which has been unshrunk is not fit to be used as a patch to mend an old, garment, fully shrunk by many washings. His disciples must act consistently, and not join untimely fasting to their enjoyment of his company. They were not the kind of persons to repair the old religion of Judaism, which had become worn out. They were new men, unshrunk by the spirit of tradition; and to try to enclose them within the vesture of legal Ritualistic religion would not tend to unity, but the reverse. Genuine believers had better not attempt fellowship with ceremonialists; they will soon find themselves out of place. Jesus did not come to patch up our old outward religiousnesses, but to make a new robe of righteousness for us. All attempts to add the gospel to legalism will only make the rent worse. It may be added that rash attempts to unite the various churches by comprehending all their errors within the pale of supposed truth, will only increase the present lamentable divisions, and postpone real unity to a distant day.

37-39. *And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.*

His teaching and spirit could not be associated with the Pharisaic order of things. Judaism in its degenerate condition was an old skin bottle which had seen its day, and our Lord would not our the new wine of the kingdom of heaven into it. - John's disciples were trying to emulate the Pharisees, and make common cause with them to save the old church. Jesus would have nothing to do with this project. he would have a new church for his new doctrine and for his new spirit. There was to be no amalgamation. Christianity was not to be an outgrowth of Rabbinism. There was to be a severance between Jesus, and the scribes and their school of thought; for he who had come was resolved to make all things new. There is rare teaching here, and guidance for the present crisis. Compromises are often proposed, and we have good people, like John's disciples, who would have us conform to what they think good in things established; but we had better act

consistently, and begin de novo. The old cloth will always be tearing, and tearing all the worse because of our new pieces; therefore let us leave the old garment to those who prefer antiquity to truth.

Luke 6

1, 2. *And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the sabbath days?*

They were probably on their way to the synagogue. They were allowed by law to take ears of corn as they passed along; but the objection of the Pharisees was to their doing so on the Sabbath. Plucking was reaping, rubbing the grain from the husk was threshing, to their hypercritical minds. Their traditions and fancies they regarded as a code of law, and according to this the disciples were doing "that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath days." They came to Jesus himself with their grave complaints: for once they plucked up courage to deal with the Leader; for they felt very strong on the Sabbath question, and they thought it fair to lay the faults of the disciples at the door of their Teacher.

We incidentally learn from this story that our Lord and his disciples were poor, and that he who fed the multitudes did not use his miraculous power to feed his own followers, but left them till they did what poor men are forced to do to supply a little stay for their stomachs. Our Lord bribes none into following him: they may be his apostles, and yet be hungry on a Sabbath.

Why did not these Pharisees give them bread, and so prevent their doing that to which they objected? We might also fairly ask, How came they to see the disciples? Did they not break the Sabbath by setting a watch over them?

3, 4. *And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; how he went into the house of God, and did take and*

eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?

He speaks to his learned opponents as if they had not read the law which they professed to uphold. “Have ye not read?” The instance of David served the Son of David well. It was clear from his example that necessity has no law. The Tabernacle law was broken by David when he and his band were pressed with hunger; and that breach of law touched Jewish ritual in a very special and tender point, and yet he was never rebuked for it. To have eaten the holy bread out of profanity, or bravado, or levity, might have involved the offender in the judgment of death; but to do so in urgent need was not blameworthy in the case of David. As men excuse any breach of manners necessitated by the pressure of hunger, so cloth the Lord permit any ceremonial point of law to give way to his mercy, and to man’s evident necessity. The law of the Sabbath was never meant to compel starvation to hungry men, any more than the law of “the house of God” and “the shewbread.” Works of necessity are lawful on the Sabbath.

5. *And he said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.*

This sets the whole matter beyond further question. “The Son of man”, Christ Jesus, being in union with the Godhead, “is Lord” of everything which lies in the range of that law which concerns God and man, seeing he is Mediator; and therefore he may arrange and dispose of Sabbaths as he pleases. He has done so, and has interpreted the Sabbatic law, not with license, but with a sweet reasonableness which the more rigid of religionists do not exhibit. From his example and teaching we learn that the Sabbath is not profaned by works of necessity, piety, or mercy; and that we need not care for the sharp speeches of hypercritical formalists who strain the Sabbatic law, and make a bondage of that which was intended to be a season of holy rest.

6. *And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered into the synagogue and taught: and there was a man whose right hand was withered.*

The time arrived when the Sabbath question came up again in reference to our

Lord’s own work among the sick and diseased.

Jesus set the example of attending public worship. The synagogues had no divine appointment to authorize them, but in the nature of things it must be right and good to meet for the worship of God on his own day, and therefore Jesus was there. He had nothing to learn, yet he went up to the assembly on the day which the Lord God had hallowed.

7. *And the scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him.*

It was remarkable that so very soon a case occurred to bring up again the matter in dispute. Did the Pharisees bring the man with the withered hand into the synagogue so as to raise the question in a practical form? They went to the synagogue to indulge their bigotry and not to worship: it is to be feared that many in these days imitate then. They were on the catch; yet they took nothing by their malicious craft.

8. *But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand, Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth.*

The man was sitting down, and Jesus bade him stand up that all might observe him.

9, 10. *Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it? And looking round about upon them all, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he did so: and his hand was restored whole as the other.*

Thus our Lord practically carried out his own teaching. He that could work a miracle of this sort was divine, and could rightly interpret his own law. It does not appear that his arm was withered, as some have supposed; but he was able, by the use of his arm to hold out his hand to public view. This being done, the

Lord restored it at once, before the whole synagogue, and before the captious Pharisees. The man stretched out each finger perfectly restored to its natural vigor. The poor man had hidden his hand when it was dried up; but when restored, it was meet that it should be seen by all in the synagogue. By that restored hand, made whole on the sabbath, all men knew that Jesus would work deeds of mercy on the sabbath.

11. *And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus.*

The synagogue was too hot for the Pharisees, and so they went out. Utterly routed, they retire from public gaze, hating the man who had so completely baffled them. They could not silence him, and so they would slay him. Those who begin with seeking to accuse the Lord soon come to seeking to destroy him. It was not easy to touch one who lived so much in the esteem of the people, and so they consulted together as to the safest method of procedure. Their killing of Jesus was indeed the result of malice aforethought, for they deliberately planned their cruel deed.

12. *And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.*

If any man of woman born might have lived without prayer it was surely the Lord Jesus Christ.Yet mark ye carefully, although our glorious Master did not require to pray in some of those respects in which it is most needful to us, yet never was there a man who was more abundant in prayer and in supplication, nor one in whom prayer was exercised with so much vehemence and importunity.

Notice the place, which he selected for it. He sought the solitude of a mountain. He was so popular that he could not hope in any city or village to be free from innumerable followers; he was so great a benefactor that he could never be without sick folk entreating healing at his hands. He knew no leisure, no, not so much as to eat bread, and therefore, to obtain a little respite, he sought the hollow of some lofty hill, where foot of man could not profane his loneliness.

13. *And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them*

he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;

See the way of making apostles. They were first disciples, and afterwards teachers of others: they were specially his, and then they were given to be a blessing to men. They were “called unto him”; and thus their higher call came to them.

14. *Simon, (whom he also named Peter,)*

The first, for he generally put himself first, and was by his energy and ability most fittingly the leader, “Simon he surnamed Peter”, “a stone”; and a right solid stone he came to be.

and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew,

It seems probable that Bartholomew is Nathanael, whom Philip led to Jesus: they are well put together. Bartholomew is never mentioned without an and: he was a kind of man to work with other people.

15, 16. *Matthew and Thomas,*

Thomas was as truly called by the Lord as any of them, though he was one whose mind entertained distressing questions.

James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.

What a description to follow a name — “which also was the traitor”! God grant it may never be set after the name of any one of us!

The apostolic number fitly represents the twelve tribes of Israel; and for practical purposes the twelve form a workable band of leaders, a sufficient jury, and a competent company of witnesses.

17. *And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the*

company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases;

Such a teacher is sure to have a following. Yet how small his spiritual following compared with the "great multitude" who outwardly came to him! Our King has many nominal subjects; but few there are who know him as their Lord, so as to be renewed in heart by the power of his grace: these along enter truly into his kingdom, and it is foolish and wicked to talk of including any others in his spiritual domain. Yet is it a hopeful sign when there is a great inquiry after Jesus, and every region and city yields its quota to the hearing throng.

18, 19. *And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all.*

The crowd flocked after him, and his love could not refuse to bless them with healing. We are under no charge to conceal his gracious wonders, and therefore we would joyfully enlarge upon that glorious record, "He healed them all." What an encouragement to sin-sick souls to trust in him!

Our Lord was not content with miracles for the body, he had the gospel for the soul, that gospel which lies in his own person as King, in his promise of pardon to believers, and in his rule of love over those who are loyal to him. To this gospel the miracles of healing were so many seals.

20. *And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.*

The King's first statutes are Benedictions. He begins his teaching with a largess of blessings. The Old Testament ended with "a curse": the New Testament opens with "Blessed." This word is by some rendered "happy"; but we like blessed best. Our Lord brings to men true Beatitudes by his teaching, and by his kingdom.

Spiritual poverty is both commanded and commended. It is the basis of Christian

experience. No one begins aright who has not felt poverty of spirit. Yet even to this first sign of grace is the kingdom given in present possession: “theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” The question in heaven’s kingdom is not, “Are you a peer?” but, “Are you poor in spirit?” Those who are of no account in their own eyes are of the blood royal of the universe. These alone have the principles and the qualifications for heavenly kingdom. May I be such!

21-23. *Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.*

Persecution of the tongue is more common, but not less cruel than that of the hand. Slander is unscrupulous, and indulges in accusations of every kind: “all manner of evil” is a comprehensive phrase. No crime is too base to be laid at the door of the innocent; nor will the persecutor have any hesitation as to the vileness of the charge. The rule seems to be, “Throw plenty of mud, and some of it will stick.” Under this very grievous trial, good men are to be more than ordinarily happy, for thus are the elevated to the rank of the prophets, upon whom the storm of falsehood beat with tremendous fury. “So persecuted they the prophets.” This is the heritage of the Lord’s messengers: they killed one, and stoned another. The honor of suffering with the prophets, for the Lord’s sake, is so great, that it may well reconcile us to all that it involves. There is an inquisitorial succession of persecutors; “for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”; and there is a prophetical succession of saints, ordained to glorify the Lord in the fires. To this succession it is our high privilege to belong; and we are happy that it is so. Our joy and gladness are to exceed all ordinary bounds when we are honored with the decoration of the iron cross, and the collar of S.S., or savage slander.

24, 25. *But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.*

Christ has nothing to do with you, and we have nothing to preach to you except this—“They that be whole need not a physician.” The heavenly Surgeon did not come to save those who have no need of saving.

26. *Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.*

Such praise is not for good soldiers of Jesus Christ. If the enemy begins to love one of the king’s generals, the king may half suspect that his general is turning traitor. God save us from such treachery!

27, 28. *But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.*

Ours it is to persist in loving, even if men persist in enmity. We are to render blessing for cursing, prayers for persecutions. Even in the cases of cruel enemies, we are to; do good to them, and pray for them.” We are no longer enemies to any, but friends to all. We do not merely cease to hate, and then abide in a cold neutrality; but we love where hatred seemed inevitable. We bless where our old nature bids us curse, and we are active in doing good to those who deserve to receive evil from us. Where this is practically carried out, men wonder, respect, and admire the followers of Jesus. The theory may be ridiculed, but the practice is reverenced, and is counted so surprising, that men attribute it to some Godlike quality in Christians, and own that they are the children of the Father who is in heaven.

29. *And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other;*

Non-resistance and forbearance are to be the rule among Christians. They are to endure personal ill-usage without coming, to blows. They are to be as the anvil when bad men are the hammers, and thus they are to overcome by patient forgiveness. The rule of the judgment-seat is not for common life; but the rule of the cross and the all-enduring Sufferer is for us all. Yet how many regard all this as fanatical, utopian, and even cowardly. The Lord, our King, would have us

bear and forbear, and conquer by mighty patience. Can we do it? How are we the servants of Christ if we have not his spirit?

and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also.

Let him have all he asks, and more. Better lose a suit of cloth than be drawn into a suit in law. The courts Of our Lord's day were vicious; and his disciples were advised to suffer wrong sooner than appeal to them. Our own courts often furnish the surest method of solving a difficulty by authority, and we have known them resorted to with the view of preventing strife. Yet even in a country where justice can be had, we are not to resort to law for every personal wrong. We should rather endure to be put upon than be for ever crying out, "I'll bring an action." At times this very rule of self-sacrifice may require us to take steps in the way of legal appeal, to stop injuries which would fall heavily upon others; but we ought often to forego our own advantage, yea, always when the main motive would be a proud desire for self-vindication. Lord, give me a patient spirit, so that I may not seek to avenge myself, oven when I might righteously do so!

30. *Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.*

Be generous. A miser is no follower of Jesus. Discretion is to be used in our giving, lest we encourage idleness and beggary; but the general rule is, "Give to him that asketh thee." Sometimes a loan may be more useful than a gift; do not refuse it to those who will make right use of it. These precepts are not meant for fools; they are set before us as our general rule; but each rule is balanced by other Scriptural commands, and there is the teaching of a philanthropic common sense to guide us. Our spirit is to be one of readiness to help the needy by gift or loan, and we are not exceedingly likely to err by excess in this direction: hence the baldness of the command.

31-34. *And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even*

the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

Any common sort of man will love those who love him; even tax. gatherer and the scum of the earth can rise to this poor, starveling virtue. Saints cannot be content with such a groveling style of things. “Love for love is manlike”; but “love for hate” is Christlike. Shall we not desire to act up to our high calling?

35, 36. *But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.*

Indeed, he is a child of God, who can bless the unthankful and the evil: for in daily providence the Lord is doing this on great scale, and none but his children will imitate him. To do good for the sake of the good done, and not because of the character of the person benefited, is a noble imitation of God. If the Lord only sent the fertilizing shower upon the land of the saintly, drought would deprive whole leagues of land of all hope of a harvest. We also must do good to the evil, or we shall have a narrow sphere, our hearts will grow contracted, and our sonship towards the good God will be rendered doubtful.

37, 38. *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

Use your judgment, of course: the verse implies that you will judge in a right sense. But do not indulge the criticizing faculty upon others in a censorious manner, or as if you were set in authority, and had a right to dispense judgment among your fellows If you impute motives, and pretend to read hearts, others will do the same towards you. A hard and censorious behavior is sure to provoke

reprisals. Those around you will pick up the peck measure you have been using, and measure your corn with it. You do not object to men forming a fair opinion of your character, neither are you forbidden to do the same towards them; but as you would object to their sitting in judgment upon you, do not sit in judgment upon them. This is not the day of judgment, neither are we his Majesty's judges, and therefore we may not anticipate the time appointed for the final assize, nor usurp the prerogatives of the Judge of all the earth.

Surely, if I know myself aright, I need not send my judgment upon circuit to try other men; for I can give it full occupation in my own Court of Conscience to try the traitors within my own bosom.

39. *And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?*

Both the Pharisees and their dupes would "fall into the ditch" of error and absurdity; and ultimately come to utter destruction. In every case it is so: when the bigoted teacher leads the ignorant disciple, they must both go wrong. The same is the case with every form of spiritual blindness in those who lead the thought of a period, and in those who follow their erroneous guidance. The philosophic unbelief of this age is blind with self-conceit, and fearful is the ditch towards which it is hastening. Alas! its teachers are carrying precious souls with them into the ditch of Atheism and anarchy.

40. *The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.*

The scholar is not more excellent than the teacher, nor the servant than his master. Who would wish to see such a violation of all order and rule? Therefore, even if we had not had so much respect paid to us as to our Lord, we ought to have been well content. If we receive the same treatment as our Master, we have enough honor, and more than we have a right to expect.

41, 42. *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in*

thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.

The judging faculty is best employed at home. Our tendency is to spy out splinters in other men's eyes, and not to see the beam in our own. Instead of beholding, with gratified gaze, the small fault of another, we should act reasonably if we penitently considered the greater fault of ourselves. It is the beam in our own eye which blinds us to our own wrongdoing; but such blindness does not suffice to excuse us, since it evidently does not shut our eyes to the little error of our brother. Officiousness pretends to play the oculist; but in very truth it plays the fool. Fancy a man with a beam in his eye pretending to deal with so tender a part as the eye of another, and attempting to remove so tiny a thing as a mote or splinter! Is he not a hypocrite to pretend to be so concerned about other men's eyes, and yet he never attends to his own? Jesus is gentle, but he calls that man a "hypocrite" who fusses about small things in others, and pays no attention to great matters at home in his own person. Our reformations must begin with ourselves, or they are not true, and do not spring from a right motive. Sin we may rebuke, but not if we indulge it. We may protest against evil, but not if we willfully practice it. The Pharisees were great at censuring, but slow at amending. Our Lord will not have his kingdom made up of hypocritical theorists, he calls for practical obedience to the rules of holiness.

43, 44. *For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit.*

Every man produces according to his nature; he cannot do otherwise. Good tree, good fruit; corrupt tree, evil fruit. There is no possibility of the effect being higher and better than the cause. The truly good does not bring forth evil; it would be contrary to its nature. The radically bad never rises to produce good, though it may seem to do so. Therefore the one and the other may be known by the special fruit of each. Our King is a great teacher of prudence. We are not to judge; but we are to know, and the rule for this knowledge is as simple as it is safe. Such knowledge of men may save us from great mischief which would come to us through associating with bad and deceitful persons.

For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes.

If we gather grapes of them, they are not thorns: if they produce nothing but thistle-down, they are not fig-trees. Some object to this practical method of test; but wise Christians will carry it with them as the ultimate touchstone. What is the effect of modern theology upon the spirituality, the prayerfulness, the holiness of the people? Has it any good effect?

45. *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.*

They had spoken evil: how could they do otherwise when their hearts were so full of malice towards him? They had gone to the utmost extreme of malevolence in charging him with being in league with Satan, and that only showed what a treasure of evil lay within their hearts. They threw evil forth with energy of temper, and with lavishness of falsehood, because they had such a fullness of it within. That which is in the well comes up in the bucket. The heart betrays itself through the mouth. Had they been good, their words would have been good; but such was their baseness of heart, that they could not speak good things. Thus our Lord carried the war into their own territory, and flashed holy indignation in their faces.

46. *And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*

No verbal homage will suffice: We may believe in our Lord's Deity, and we may take great pains to affirm it over and over again with our "Lord, Lord"; but unless we carry out the commands of the Father, we pay no true homage to the Son. We may own our obligations to Jesus, and so call him "Lord, Lord"; but if we never practically carry out those obligations, what is the value of our admissions? Our King receives not into his kingdom those whose religion lies in words and ceremonies; but only those whose lives display the obedience of true discipleship.

47, 48. *Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock.*

We are to hear our Lord; and by this is, of course, intended that we are to accept what he says as authoritative: this is more than some do at this time, for they sit in judgment upon the teachings of the Lord. But hearing is not enough; we must do these sayings. There must be practical godliness, or nothing is right within us. The doing hearer has built a house with a stable foundation: the wisest and safest, but the most expensive and toilsome thing to do. Trials come to him. His sincerity and truthfulness do not prevent his being tested. From above, and from beneath, and from all sides, the trials come: rain, floods and wind. No screen is interposed: all these "beat vehemently upon that house." It is a substantial structure; but the tests become so severe that nothing can save the building unless it be the strength of its foundation. Because the chief support is so immovable the entire erection survives. It may have suffered damage here and there, and it may have looked very weather-beaten; but could not be shaken. Let the Rock of Ages be praised if, after terrible tribulation, it can be said of our faith, "it was founded upon a rock."

49. *But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great.*

The mere hearer is in a poor plight. He, too, is a house-builder. The hearing of the Lord's sayings sets him upon work, and work which is designed to afford him shelter and comfort. He "built an house": he was practical and persevering, and did not begin and leave off before completion. Yet though he was industrious, he was foolish. No doubt he built quickly, for his foundation cost him no severe labor; his excavations were soon made, for there was no rock to remove: he "built his house upon the earth." But trials come even to insincere professors. Are we not all born to trouble? The same kind of afflictions come to the foolish as come to the wise, and they operate in precisely the same way; but

the result is very different.

“It fell.” These are solemn words. It was a fine building, and it promised to stand for ages; but “it fell.” There were minor faults in the fabric, but its chief weakness was underground, in the secret place of the foundation: the man “built his house upon the earth.” His fundamentals were wrong.

The crash was terrible; the sound was heard afar: “the ruin of that house was great.” The overflow was final and irretrievable. Many heard the fall, and many more saw the ruins as they remained a perpetual memorial of the result of that folly which is satisfied with hearing, and neglects doing.

Luke 7

1-5. *Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he was worthy for whom he should do this: for he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.*

It is good for masters to be concerned for their servants, especially when they are sick. It is best of all when they go to Jesus about their servants, as this centurion did. The boy was at his master's house: he had not packed him off because he was ill. The kind master watched his servant's bed, and he sympathetically describes what he had seen. He seeks a cure, but does not prescribe to the Lord how or where he shall work it: in fact, he does not put his request into words, but pleads the case, and lets the sorrow speak. Not merit, but misery, must be our plea with the Savior.

6-8. *Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him, Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.*

He would not put the Lord Jesus to so much trouble as to come to his house. He felt unworthy to be served at such a cost by such a Lord. He argues that a word will do it all. He was under authority himself, and hence his power to exercise authority over others. He believed that the Lord Jesus had a commission also from the supreme power, and that this would gird him with command over all the minor forces of the universe, a command which he could exercise from a distance with a single word. If soldiers would come and go at a centurion's bidding, much more would diseases fly at the word of the Lord Jesus. It was a thoughtful argument, but it was fair and conclusive. May we also know Jesus under authority, Jesus with authority, and ourselves under authority to Jesus! May we also believe in the omnipotence of the divine word, and go forth and prove its power in the hearts of men! O thou, who art our King, display thy royal power!

9. *When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*

Jesus marvelled to see any man believe; for men are incredulous by nature. He rejoices to see a far-off one believe; for, alas! the favored hearers are slow to trust him. He marvels at a soldier, an officer, having so much faith. Jesus did not praise the centurion to his face, but what he spoke "he said unto the people that followed him." Learn, from what our Lord said, that he looks out for faith; that he looks for it among hearers of the Word; that he usually does not find it; but that, when he does, it may be so great as to astonish him. Great faith may grow where there is little soil, and no faith where everything seemed to promise and promote it. Great faith is very dear to the Lord Jesus; but he marvels when he sees it, for it is so rare.

10. *And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.*

Our Lord spoke the word as the centurion desired. The result was immediate and complete: not only was life spared, but health restored. Many a time prolonged prayer is but muttering unbelief; and to go about one's business would be to take the Lord at his word, and honor his veracity.

11. *And it came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people.*

Our Savior was journeying, and he works miracles while on the road: “He went into a city called Nain.” It was incidentally, some would say accidentally, that he met the funeral procession; but at once he restored to life this dead young man. Our blessed Lord was not standing still, as one professionally called in; he does not seem to have come to Nain at any one’s request for the display of his love; but he was passing through the gate into the city, for some reason which is not recorded.

12. *Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.*

It was a remarkable incident, this meeting of the two processions at the gates of Nain. If some one with a fine imagination could picture it, what an opportunity he would have for developing his poetical genius! I venture on no such effort. Yonder a procession descends from the city. Our spiritual eyes see death upon the pale horse coming forth from the city gate with great exultation. He has taken another captive. Upon that bier behold the spoils of the dread conqueror! Mourners by their tears confess the victory of death. Like a general riding in triumph to the Roman capitol, death bears his spoils to the tomb. What shall hinder him? Suddenly the procession is arrested by another: a company of disciples and much people are coming up the hill. We need not look at the company, but we may fix our eyes upon one who stands in the center, a man in whom lowliness was always evident, and yet majesty was never wanting. It is the living Lord, even he who only hath immortality, and in him death has now met his destroyer.

13. *And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.*

As a natural fact, this dead young man, who was being carried out to his burial, caused his mother’s heart to burst with grief. She showed by her tears that her heart was overflowing with sorrow.

The blessed Savior saw all at a glance. Out of that procession he singled out the chief mourner, and read her inmost heart. He was always tender to mothers. He fixed his eye on that widow; for he knew that she was such, without being informed of the fact. The dead man is her only son: he perceives all the details, and feels. Nothing is hid from his infinite mind.

14. *And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still.*

Our Lord then went to the bier, and just laid his finger upon it, and they that bare it stood still of their own accord. When they stood quite still, there was a hush. The disciples stood around the Lord, the mourners surrounded the widow, and the two crowds faced each other. That hush was not long, for speedily the Great Quickener entered upon his gracious work.

And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

He spake as if the man had been alive. This is the gospel way. He did not wait till he saw signs of life before he bade him rise; but to the dead man he said, "Arise." This is the model of gospel preaching: in the name of the Lord Jesus, his commissioned servants speak to the dead as if they were alive. We bid unbelieving man believe in Jesus, and power goes with the Word, and God's elect do believe. It is by this word of faith which we preach that the voice of Jesus sounds out to men. The young man who could not rise, for he was dead, nevertheless did rise when Jesus bade him. Even so, when the Lord speaks by his servants the gospel command, "Believe and live," is obeyed, and men live.

15. *And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.*

The miracle was wrought straightway: for this young man, to the astonishment of all about him, sat up. His was a desperate case, but death was conquered, for he sat up. He had been called back from the innermost dungeon of death, even from the grave's mouth; but he sat up when Jesus called him. It did not take a month, nor a week, nor an hour, nay, not even five minutes. Jesus said, "Young man, Arise." And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak." In an instant the

Lord can save a sinner.

16, 17. *And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people. And this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judaea, and throughout all the region round about.*

What was the next result? Well, all the neighbors feared and glorified God. Note that it not only surprised the neighbors and impressed them, but the rumor of it went everywhere.

When you go home and tell what God has done for your soul, there will be a wider ring; and if it should happen that the Lord should open the mouth of one of this morning's converts to preach his word, then no one can tell how wide the circle will become. Ring upon ring will the word spread itself, until the shoreless ocean of eternity shall feel the influence of this morning's word.

18. *And the disciples of John shewed him of all these thing.*

John was in prison, and, possibly, troubled in spirit.

19. *And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus saying, art thou he that should come? or look we for another?*

Did John doubt, then? Perhaps not. It may be that he sew that his disciples doubted, and that he wished their fears to be removed. It is possible, however, that he did himself have doubts. It is no unusual thing for the bravest hearts to be subject to fits of doubt. Elijah, you remember sat under a juniper tree in the wilderness, "and he requested for himself that he might die," though he was the man who never was to die. And John—the Elijah of the Christian dispensation, though a man of iron, was but a man, so he sent two of his disciples to Jesus, saying, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?"

20–23. *When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come, or look*

we for another? And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard;

Our old proverb says that actions speak louder than words, so an answer in his actions would be more eloquent with these enquirers than even an answer in our Lord's own words. He bade them look at the evidences of his Messiahship which he gave them by his miraculous cures, and then he said to them, "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard." It would be well if our lives were such that, if any enquired what we were, we should only have to say that they might judge us by what they had seen and heard in our common every-day life and conversation.

how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

According to our Lord's testimony, the preaching of the gospel to the poor is as great a proof of his Messiahship as the raising of the dead. Then how highly it ought to be prized by them, and how glad should they be who have the gospel now preached freely in their hearing!

24. *And when the messengers of John were departed, he began to speak unto the people concerning John, What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?*

Certainly not; John could never be compared to a reed shaken with the wind, for he was strong, sturdy, firm, and steadfast. He was not like so many preachers, nowadays, who are swayed by the ever-changing opinion of the age—the thought of these modern times—and so prove themselves to be mere reeds shaken with the wind.

25. *But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously apparelled, and live delicately, are*

in kings' courts.

John had been preaching in the desert, with all his might warning sinners to flee from the wrath to come. He was no court preacher, but a minister to the multitude, who delivered his heaven-inspired message in his own straightforward earnest style.

26, 27. *But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.*

John was the morning star, and Christ the glorious Sun. John was the herald proclaiming the coming of Christ, and Christ himself followed close at his heels.

28. *For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist:*

His was the highest office of all, immediately to precede Messiahs himself.

but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

We have a fuller gospel to preach than John had, and we may expect to see greater results from the preaching of that gospel than John could hope to see. Passing into the dispensation of clearer light, he who is least among the believers of the gospel of Jesus is, in some respects, greater than this man, who could only preach repentance, and point to a coming Savior.

29–32. *And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and*

saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept.

These children could not agree as to what game they would play. “Come,” they said, “let us imitate a wedding, we will pipe, and you can dance.” But the others would not dance. “Well,” they said, “let us play at something.

Let us imitate a funeral; we will be the mourners.” Then the others would not weep. They would agree to nothing that was proposed, and that is the point of the Savior’s analogy, that there are multitudes of men who always quarrel with any kind of ministry that God may send to them. This man’s style is much too florid; he has a superabundance of the flowers of oratory.

That other man is much too dull; there is nothing interesting about his discourses. This man is too coarse; he is so rough as even to be vulgar.

That other man is too refined, and uses language which shoots over people’s heads. It is easy to find fault when you want to do so. And stick will do to beat a dog, and any kind of excuse will do to allow your conscience to escape from the message of an earnest ministry. Our Lord told the people that this was the way they had acted towards himself and John the Baptist.

33. *For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine;*

An ascetic of ascetics

and ye say, He hath a devil.

“He is out of his mind altogether, possessed by the devil.”

34. *The Son of man is come eating and drinking;*

That is the Lord Jesus himself. He comes as a man among men, and sits with you at your feasts, and does not lead the life of an ascetic.

and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of

publicans and sinners!

There was no pleasing them either way; whichever form of preacher the Lord sent, whether an ascetic or one like themselves, they found fault.

35. *But wisdom is justified of all her children.*

Though the world contemns all wisdom's children, whichever way they go, and is not pleased with their manners, whatever manners they possess, yet, in the long run, when the wisdom of God shall be all unfolded, it will be seen that the roughness of John and the gentleness and lovingkindness of Jesus were both right in their proper place. If fish are not caught in the gospel fishery, it may sometimes be the fisherman's fault, but more often, it is the fault of the fish themselves. Here we have two very different kinds of fishermen, yet neither of them attracts all, though each of them draws some.

36. *And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.*

It was usually a suspicious circumstance when a Pharisee desired to be familiar with Christ; it might generally be suspected that he wished to entrap him. Yet, on this occasion, if there was no real friendliness to Christ, there was at least the appearance of it. We see what our Savior did when the Pharisee gave him an invitation: "He went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat." The Lord saw there an opportunity for usefulness.

He knew that be would have a good reason for speaking personally to this Pharisee, who, peradventure, was one of the other sort. At all events, our Lord felt that it was right for him to go into that house, even if they did watch him, and try to catch him in his talk. If there was hypocrisy there, there was the more need for his presence, as Jesus himself said concerning his eating with publicans and sinners, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick."

37, 38. *And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner,*

Her name is not given; and there are good reasons why it should not be given.

Certainly, she was not Mary the sister of Lazarus, nor yet Mary Magdalene, we may be quite cure of that. Our Savior leaves her in an anonymous condition; and it is usually best that converts of this character should not be exhibited, and their names made known. I believe that much cruel wrong has been done to reclaimed sinners when they have been pushed to the front. “Behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner,”—

when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at his feet behind him weeping,

His feet probably lay towards the door as he reclined at the table, and she could readily get at them without becoming too conspicuous in the room: she “stood at his feet behind him weeping,”—

and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

What a blessed amalgam of humility penitence, gratitude, and love! All these are seen in what she did, especially in that unbinding of the tresses of her beauty, which had been her nets in which she had taken the souls of men, now she uses these for a towel. She “began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.”

39. *Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying,*

Well, what did he say? I think that, if some of us, taught of God, and let into the secret of eternal love, had been there, we should have whispered to one another, “What a change has been wrought in that woman! There she is, weeping, and washing the Savior’s feet, when, but the other day, she was standing at the corners of the streets, in the attire of a harlot, plying her accursed trade.” How greatly we should have rejoiced to see her! But it is only grace that teaches us to rejoice over even one sinner that repenteth, and Simon the Pharisee appeared to

know little or nothing of grace. He had, however, the good manners not to say aloud what he thought, but “he spake within himself, saying,”—

This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

She is a sinner, and does he let her touch him, and kiss his feet, and show such tokens of affection? What man must he be who allows a harlot’s kiss, even though it be upon his feet? Ah! poor foolish Pharisee! He judged according to the sight of the eye, or else he might have known that the best of men would never be angry at a harlot’s tears, for the tears of repentance, come from whatever heart they may, are always like diamonds in the esteem of thee who judge rightly.

40. *And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on.*

Christ often answers people who do not speak audibly, he answers those who only speak in their hearts. So you, who are silently praying, may take comfort. If Jesus answers a Pharisee who speaks in his heart against him, much more readily will he answer his own people when they are speaking in their hearts to him. It was a hopeful sign that Simon used a respectful title in speaking to Christ, and that he was willing to listen.

41. *There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.*

Both the parties were in debt: “the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty;” but they were both in debt. So, if some men have plunged into the grossest vice, and defiled themselves, and polluted their lives, they are certainly in debt five hundred pence; but if others have been kept from overt acts of transgression, yet, since their hearts have gone astray from God, and since, with their desires, and with their lips, and in many respects even in their actions, they have broken his holy law, they also are in debt; fifty pence, it may be; bus, still, they are in debt. There is not one man among us who can stand before the Most High and say to him, “I owe nothing to thy justice, for I have never infringed thy

righteous laws." Any man who should say that would be a liar, and the truth would not be in him. If we say that we have no sin, or that we have not sinned, we lie in the face of the living God, and in the teeth of our own conscience, too. So, we are all in debt, even if the amount differs in each case.

42, 43. *And when they had nothing to pay,*

Although both the parties were in debt, neither of them had anything with which to meet the liability: "they had nothing to pay." One only owed fifty pence; but, then, he had not the fifty pence; nay, he had not even one penny out of the fifty required to meet the amount. The other debtor owed five hundred pence, and his plight was just the same, for he had nothing to pay.

he frankly forgave them both.

He did not say to either of them: "I will set you a certain time, and you shall pay me so much a week until you clear it off." Oh, no! he forgave them both, wiped the score out altogether. He did not ask anything of them, for he knew that they had nothing; but he forgave them, says the text, frankly; that is, freely. He did not forgive one of them because his debt was a misfortune, which he could not avoid; but he frankly forgave them both. He did not look for any worthiness in either of them, or expect anything from either of them; but, as an act of pure gratuitous favor, because he delighted to show kindness to his poor debtors, he said, "There, go home, both of you; I shall never ask you for the amount of your debts again. I have crossed it off my—book, though I have received nothing whatsoever from you."

Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

The question turns not so much upon the actual amount of debt, as upon the consciousness of the magnitude of that debt—not so much, in the matter of love, upon the indebtedness, as upon the sense of that indebtedness; so that you, who have been kept in the ways of morality, before you were converted, may rightly place yourselves among the greatest debtors, and, peradventure, may love Christ

even more than some others do, who have actually been grosser offenders, but who have never been awakened to such a full sense of their sinfulness as you have had; and, consequently, do not think themselves to be the greatest debtors to God. It is, dear friends, a deep sense of our sinfulness, coupled with the perfect consciousness of our forgiveness, that will work in us intense love to Christ.

44. *And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman?*

"You did see this woman, and you looked upon her with a frowning face; now take another look at her by the light of my parable." "Simon, seest thou this woman?"

I entered into thine house,

"Therefore thou wast bound by the obligations of a host,"—

thou gavest me no water for my feet,

An ordinary commonplace courtesy in the East, almost a necessity for those who have walked far, and whose feet are weary and dusty: "Thou gavest me no water for my feet:"—

but she hath washed my feet with tears,

Costly water this! "She hath washed my feet with tears."

and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

"She has done it, she has done it better than thou wouldst have done it, she has done it best of all, she has done what thou oughtest to have done, she has done it when there seemed to be no claim upon her to do it."

45. *Thou gavest me no kiss,*

Which was usually given as a greeting to guests at that time. Simon had not given to Jesus the honor which was due to him, which would have been to kiss his forehead.

but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet.

“You said in your heart that, if I had been a prophet, I should have known who and what manner of woman this was. I do know, and I am telling you. If you had given me a kiss, you would only have coldly kissed my brow, but she has found it in her heart to honor me by kissing my feet. Since I came in, she has not ceased to kiss them, unwashed as they were; and she has not only kissed them, but she has also washed them with her tears.”

46. *My head with oil thou didst not anoint—*

“Thou, the host, whose duty it was to anoint the head of thy guest, didst not do it,”—

but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

The best unguent she possessed or could procure.

47, 48. *Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.*

There I see the clear run of the argument—that she is a woman who has had much forgiven by Christ, and that is the reason why she loves him so much. But, often, when an inference is very natural and plain, the Savior leaves men to draw that one for themselves, while he draws another. He puts the same truth in another shape: “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.”

I am afraid that there are many professed Christians, who must have had very little forgiven them, for they love Christ very little. This seems to be the age of little love to Christ. There are some few who love the Master intensely, but, oh, how few they are! Some persons think they are only very little sincere; and we are told, nowadays, what a little thing sin is, and what a little place hell is, and what a very short time the punishment of sin will last. Everything is according to scale, and it must be so in religion; as you diminish the guilt of sin, and the punishment of sin, you also diminish the sense of obligation in being saved from sin. Consequently, you diminish our love to Christ, and we shall gradually get less and less, I fear, unto the old scale, the old balance, the old shekel of the sanctuary, shall once again be used by us.

49. *And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also?*

Now, you see, they begin to mutter and to cavil. What is this poor woman to do? Probably she felt ready to speak up for her Master; but, sometimes, it happens that the Lord Jesus Christ will not permit certain even of his forgiven ones to be very prominent.

50. *And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*

He did not want this young convert, this beginner in the Christian life to hear the bickerings and controversies of these coarse spirits, so he said to her, “Go in peace; and, dear soul, if you have begun to find out that, even in the Christian Church there are many opinions concerning many things, do not trouble yourself about those things. This is enough for thee: “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” There may be some who are galled to contend for this or that point of the faith; but, as for thee, poor child, if, with thy broken heart, thou hast found the Savior, and if thou lovest him with an inward, warm, and hearty love, do not spoil that love by getting into a controversial spirit: “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”

Luke 8

1. *And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him,*

Our Lord's display of forgiving grace to the woman who was a sinner seemed to whet his appetite for soul-saving, so that "he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God." Dear friends, whenever we win a soul for God, let it spur us on to a greater diligence in his service, let it make us insatiable for more of this best wine of the kingdom of heaven. It was so with our Divine Master. He went about preaching; and, as he preached, he was training others also to preach: "the twelve were with him." I think that, whenever there is a successful ministry, there should be those round about who are being trained to continue it. Among the Waldensians, the pastors were always accompanied by young men who learnt to preach from their example, and who shared their toils when they went from valley to valley proclaiming the gospel.

2, 3. *And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirit and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.*

The previous chapter tells how the woman in Simon's house manifested her love to the Savior. She showed her love in one way, and in a very special way; but there were others, who had similar affection for him, who showed it in other ways. What is right for one person to do might not be a wise or right thing for everybody to do. Christ did not want his feet washed with tears every minute in the day, nor to have them anointed with even precious ointment very often.

There are some Christians who ought to do, and I trust will do, some extraordinary thing for Christ—something which shall need no apology from them, because they are extraordinary persons, who used to be extraordinary sinners; and it would not be right for them to run in the ruts made by others, but they ought to strike out a distinct pathway for themselves. Happy is the church that has any such members; happier still if it has many such. But there are others, who love Christ just as truly, yet who must be content to show their love to him in some other, and apparently more common, but, perhaps, in the long run, more useful way.

These gracious women ministered to Christ of their substance. He was only a poor itinerant preacher who needed daily sustenance. Some people say that every preacher ought to earn his own bread by trade or profession, and preach freely, yet the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of preachers, did not do this. "Oh, but Paul did!" Yes, Paul attained to a very high honor; but we may be perfectly satisfied, as the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, to attain to as high a degree of honor as our Master did; and, inasmuch as he never did any carpentering after he began to preach, but gave his whole soul and being up to the work of preaching, he was fed and cared for by the kindness of these godly women who were glad to minister unto him of their substance. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord." So, as ministers of Christ, we need not be ashamed to minister spiritual things to the people, and to receive of their carnal things in return. These women, though they did not wash Christ's feet with their tears, nor anoint them with precious ointment, did well, for they "ministered unto him of their substance." Let us all do for him all that we can.

4. *And when much people were gathered together, and were come to him out of every city, he spake by a parable:*

He had much instruction to give, and he chose to convey it in parables. What wonderful pictures they were! for us, as well as for those who heard them! This parable of the sower is a mine of teaching concerning the kingdom; for the seed was "the word of the kingdom."

"Behold!": every word is worthy of attention. Maybe, the preacher pointed to a farmer, who was beginning to sow one of the terraces.

5. *A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.*

"A sower", read "The Sower." Jesus, our Lord, has taken up this business of the Sower at his Father's bidding. The sower "went out." See him leaving the Father's house, with this one design upon his heart —"to sow."

When he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side: even when the Chief Sower is at work, some seed fails. We know he sows the best of seed, and in the best manner; but some of it falls on the trodden path, and so lies uncovered and unaccepted of the soil. That soil was hard, and beaten down with traffic. There, too, on the wayside, we meet with dust to blind, settlements of mud to foul, and birds to pilfer: it is not a good place for good seed. No wonder, as the seeds lay all exposed, that the fowls came and devoured them up. If truth does not enter the heart, evil influences soon remove it.

6. *And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture.*

Or, as Mark records it, "because it had no depth of earth." There was just a little coating of earth, sufficient for the fructification and the early sprouting of the seed; it came up all the more quickly because it was so near the surface, and because the heat could get at it so easily, the hard pan of the rook speedily sending up the heat to it. But, for that very reason, "as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture."

7. *And some fell among thorns; and the thorn sprang up with it, and choked it.*

The ground was originally a thornbrake, and had been cleared by the thorns being cut down; but speedily the old roots sent out new shoots, and other weeds came up with them; and the tangled beds of thistles, thorns, nettles, and what not, strangled the feeble up-shootings of the wheat. The native plants choked the poor stranger. They would not permit the intrusive corn to share the field with them: evil claims a monopoly of our nature. Thus we have seen three sots of

seed come to an untimely end.

8. *And other fell on good ground, and sprang up and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hears let him hear.*

There are many, who have ears, who do not hear to any real purpose. There is the physical act of hearing, but they do not hear in the heart and the mind. It is a very different thing to have an impression on the drum of the ear and to have an impression on the tablet of the heart. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

9. *And his disciples asked him, saying, What might this parable be?*

Perhaps the crowd had complained to the disciples that they could not see what their Master was driving at The apostles may have felt unable to reply. As the matter perplexed them, they did well to enquire of their infallible Teacher, rather than to invent an explanatory theory, which might have been altogether a mistake.

10. *And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.*

It was a time of judicial visitations. These people had for centuries refused to hear the voice of God and now they were to pay the penalty for that refusal. The reward of virtue is capacity for higher virtue, just as the effect of vice is a tendency to yet greater vice. When men will not hear the voice of God, it is a just judgment upon them that they cannot hear, their impotence being the result of their impudence. Since they would not hear, they shall not; who shall say that this is not a very just and natural way of allowing sin to punish itself? So these people heard the words of our Savior’s parable. It was like a clock, a covering to the truth; but, to them, it hid the truth, they did not see it. To the disciples of Christ, it set forth truth in all its beauty; but, to the unbelieving people, it bid the truth, so that they did not discern it.

If you and I understand heavenly mysteries let us not be proud that it is so, but

let us hear our Savior saying to us, “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” This is the gift of the free grace of God. Be very thankful for it, but give God all the glory of it. For if thou beginnest to say to thyself, “I am a man of great understanding,” and if thou shalt take to thyself a high place, God may leave thee to thy natural blindness; and, then, where wilt thou be?

11. *Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God.*

Not the word of man. Have we a word of God at all? Brethren, that is a question which we have to answer nowadays. Our fathers never questioned it, they believed in the infallibility of the Bible, as we do. But, now, all our wise men do not think so. They set to work to mend the Scriptures, to pick out of the Bible that which they imagine to be inspired. Let us not do so, my brethren.

12. *Those by the way side are they that hear, then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.*

Satan is always on the watch to hinder the Word. He is always afraid to leave the truth even in hard and dry contact with a mind, and so he catcheth it away at once, and it is forgotten, or even disbelieved. It is gone, at any rate; and we have not in our hearer’s mind a corn-field, but a highway, hard, and much frequented. The man was not an opposer, he received seed; but he received the truth as he was, without the soil of his nature being changed; and the seed remained as it was, till the foul bird of hell took it off the place, and there was an end of it. So far as the truth was sown in his heart, it was in his natural, unrenewed heart, and therefore it took no living hold. How many such hearers we have! To these we preach in vain; for what they learn they unlearn, and what they receive they reject almost as soon as it comes to them.

13. *They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy;*

They are very hasty converts, like men who hurriedly take a bath. They are no sooner in than they are out; it is so speedy that there is more haste than real

speed with some of them.

and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away.

“These have no root,” and they never had any root. If you give your child a little garden for himself, perhaps he will go and pluck the heads for some of your flowers, and put them in the ground, and say, “There, father, see what a nice garden of flowers I have got.” But they have no root, and so they very soon wither away. These are like men’s converts, of whom we read that so many scores came forward the whole of the people in the parish were said to be converted, but in six weeks you cannot find one of them.

How often is this the case! We begin to be afraid of those statistics, because there is so little truth in them; and yet, if there were but one saved out of a hundred, how grateful we should be!

14. *And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, gone forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.*

This class of hearers we know by personal acquaintance in this busy age. They hear the word, they are affected by the gospel, they take it as seed into their minds, and it grows well for a season; but the heart cannot belong to two absorbing objects at the same time, and therefore these men cannot long yield themselves up to the world and Christ too. Care to get money, covetousness, trickery, and sins which come from hasting to be rich, or else pride, luxury, oppression, and other sins which come of having obtained wealth, prevent the man from being useful in religious matters, or even sincere to himself. He keeps his profession; he occupies his place; but his religion does not grow; in fact, it shows sad signs of being choked and checked by worldliness. The leaf of outward religiousness is there, but there is no dew on it; the ear of promised fruit is there, but there are no kernels in it. The weeds have outgrown the wheat, and smothered it. We cannot grow thorn and corn at the same time: the attempt is fatal to a harvest for Jesus.

Would not a good husbandman root out the thorns and brambles? Should we not,

as much as possible, keep free from the care to get, to preserve, to increase, and to hoard worldly riches? Our heavenly Father will see that we have enough; why do we fret about earthly things? We cannot give our minds to these things and to the kingdom also.

15. *But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.*

Or, "with perseverance, with continuance." "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." He is not converted at all who is not converted eternally. The work of man is temporary; the work of God is everlasting.

16. *No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.*

A candlestick, or lamp-stand. True religion and true doctrine are not intended to be concealed, they are meant to be seen, and if any of you are hiding these blessed things away, I pray you to do so no longer. Bring out your candle, and put it on the candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.

17. *For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.*

You cannot conceal anything from the eye of God, so do not try to do so. You are like bees in a glass hive, watched while you are working, and your every movement observed. God can read the secret emotions of our hidden nature. "All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

18. *Take heed therefore how ye hear:*

You think, and think very properly, that we ought to take heed how we preach. Yes, that is true; but you must take heed how you hear. There are a great many criticisms upon preaching, will you kindly make a few criticisms upon your own

hearing? I like what a woman said to me some time ago, about a certain preacher. She said, “I heard him well last Sunday.” Ay, that is the thing, she did not tell me how he preached, she told me how she heard, and that is the main point. Good hearers will make good preachers, in due time, I do not doubt. God grant that we may be all good hearers! “Take heed therefore how ye hear.”

for whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

Preaching will enrich you or impoverish you according to how you hear. There are some hearers, who have nothing, and the preacher gives them nothing. Hens like to lay where there is a nest-egg, and preachers of the gospel like to preach to hearers who have received some truth, and want more. Where there is some love to God, and love to souls, there more will come. May all of you be among those who have, to whom more shall be given! But the gospel is also “a savor of death unto death” to some who hear it. It takes away from some men what they never had. You call that a paradox; so it is, but it is true. They think they have it, but the gospel reveals to them their mistake; and so it taketh from them that which they seem to have.

19. *Then came to him his mother and his brethren, and could not come at him for the press.*

The members of his family had come to take him, because they thought him beside himself. No doubt the Pharisees had so represented his ministry to his relatives that they thought they had better restrain him, lest he should procure his own destruction by his zealous preaching. Friends may be a good man’s greatest hindrance. How dare they act in this manner? By the request of his mother and his brethren he is called away from the pressing engagement of teaching the people, which was his urgent lifework; but the call had no power over him. What ailed Mary that she joined in this transaction? Many a nervous mother has been ready to hold back her consecrated son when his courage has defied danger. Our Lord did not allow his love to his mother to turn him aside.

20. *And it was told him by certain which said, Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to see thee.*

An officious person reported the errand of the family: one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without. It is hard when interruptions come from our own flesh and blood; for strangers are sure to back them up. Ignorantly or willfully, the reporting person lent himself to the design of the relatives by representing that they were desiring to speak with him; though, indeed, they desired to take him. He who would not permit a disciple to neglect his duty on the plea of burying his father, how will he act now that his mother comes to hinder him? He will do the right thing. We may always find the rule of our conduct by asking the question, “What would Jesus do?”

21. *And he answered and said unto them, my mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.*

The spiritual relationship overtops the natural. But what a sweet and condescending word this is? Dear brothers and sisters, do you hear the Word of God, and do it? If so, Christ is at home with you. Christ calls you “Brother.” He knows that you will take care of his cause. He calls you “Brother.” He has deep sympathy with you. O blessed One, thou who callest us mother and brother, how he welcome those loving and familiar titles!

22. *Now it came to pass on a certain day, that he went into a ship with his disciples: and he said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth.*

He saw the crowds becoming dangerous, and perhaps too enthusiastic, and so he took ship for the further shore to be away from their rash acts. Too often we court the notoriety which our Lord avoided. Is it not because we are swayed by inferior motives, which had no power over him? We ought not to keep to the side where we get flattery, but we should “depart unto the other side” to begin fresh work. Moreover, “the other side” may be the side which needs us most, and it is right even to leave a multitude which have had their share of privilege to go to a smaller company who have had no time of gracious opportunity.

23. *But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled with water, and were in jeopardy.*

This inland lake was subject to sudden squalls and tempests, wherein the wind raged so as to lift the boat fairly out of the water. This was an unusually bad storm: the little ship seemed lost: the wind of the tempest covered it. The comfort was that Christ was in the vessel, and his presence covered the boat, as surely as did the waves. Yet the presence of our great Lord will not prevent our being tossed by a great tempest.

24. *And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish.*

He was not flurried: his trust in his great Father was so firm, that, rocked in the cradle of the deep, he slept peacefully. Winds howled, and waters dashed over him; but he slept on. His disciples caused him more disquiet than the storm. They "awoke him" with their cries. They were mistrustful, and ready to upbraid him with indifference. Much fear cried, "We perish." Men in a storm cannot be very select in their language, but they learn to be very earnest and eager.

Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm.

See the Lord rise from his hard couch. In royal dignity he lifts up himself. A word makes a calm. As it was a great tempest, now he gives a great calm: there was nothing little in the whole business, except the disciples' faith. When our Lord rebuked the winds, he did in the best manner rebuke their unbelief. He has very happy ways of correcting us by the greatness of His mercy to us.

25. *And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.*

It was well that they wondered; it would have been better had they adored. If Christ had been only man, the wonder about him would have been beyond all wonderment. He was divine, and hence to his royal word all nature yielded. This is the end of the wonder of the intellect, but it is the beginning of the worship of the heart. In this case, our glorious King for the moment unveiled his glory, and commanded obedience from the most boisterous of the elements. In our own

cases how often have we had to cry out, “What manner of man is this!” How grandly has he brought us through terrible storms! How easily has he calmed the surges of our souls! Blessed be his name! Still “the winds and the sea obey him.”

26, 27. *And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.*

To what a frightful state of wretchedness this poor creature was reduced by Satanic power! Yet he is only a picture of the state of mind into which many are brought through sin. They seem as if they could not live with their fellow-men; they have grown so mad through sin, so utterly beyond restraint, that they can scarcely be endured in ordinary society. Yet, as Christ healed this man, so he is equal to the cure of the worst case of spiritual and moral disease that may be brought before him.

28. *When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not.*

See the devil can make men pray against themselves; and this is what they do in common profane swearing when they imprecate all manner of curses upon their eyes and limbs. Ah, me! To what mischief and folly and misery can Satan drive his willing dupes!

29. *(For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bonds, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)*

Such cases have we often seen—young men who have been rescued from a course of vice, and who have been for a season helped towards virtue; but they have broken loose again. There was no holding them in; they had not learned self-restraint, and no one else could restrain them

30, 31. *And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him. And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep.*

So, you see, dear friends, that devils can pray: "They besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep;" that is, to their place of torment in her. They would sooner go to the bottom of the sea than go to their own dreadful home; and, if we are half as wise as devils are, we shall dread beyond all things to be driven there. May God grant that no soul among us may ever lift up his eyes in torment, and find himself in that awful deep!

32, 33. *And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.*

Our proverb says, "They run hard whom the devil drives;" and when once he begins to drive men or swine, there is no end to their running till they are choked in the deep. Woe unto that man, then, who yields himself up to the tyrant master! Oh, seek the grace that will enable you to fling him off, never to come under his dread sway again! Better still, pray the blessed Prince of Peace to cast out the black prince of hell, and himself to rule over your spirit, soul, and body.

34. *When they that fed them saw what was done, they fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country.*

Sometimes, Christ wrought cures which were scarcely mentioned; but here—and I only remember a second miracle at all like to it—that of the withering of the barren fig-tree—he wrought a miracle of judgment, and it caused a great stir and much talk. I have heard of bells at sea, that only ring out in the roughest storms. Here is one that was heard when softer tones would not have been heeded: "They fled, and went and told it in the city and in the country."

35. *Then they went out to see what was done and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.*

There was some clothing work done that day. I know not who provided the garments; but here was some real practical Christianity exhibited, not only by the Master in healing the demoniac, but by the friends who found clothing for this poor man. You do well, my sisters, who set yourselves to help to clothe the poor. God grant that all of them may not only be clothed, but also be led to sit at the feet of Jesus!

36, 37. *They also which saw it told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed. Then the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them; for they were taken with great fear:*

Surely, this legion of demons must have had the same effect on them as on the poor man when Christ first came to him. These foolish people took up the same cry as the poor demoniac: “The whole multitude besought him to depart from them? Christ sometimes hears this kind of prayer. There is many a man who has entreated that his conscience might not be troubled any more, and it never has been troubled again. But what an awful prayer for any people to pray! “The whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them.”

38, 39. *And he went up into the ship, and returned back again. Now the man out of whom the devils were departed besought him that he might be with him:*

Was not that a proper prayer? I think that not only nature, but the man’s new nature must have suggested this petition; he prayed Christ that he might be with him. In our day, it is very natural that, as soon as we are converted, we should wish to go home to heaven; but what is the reason why we should not do so? It is in order that we may bear witness for Christ here on earth, and gather in others unto him.

but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and shew how great things God hath done unto thee. And he went his way, and published throughout the whole city how great things Jesus had done unto him.

Sometimes, it is better to be spreading the good news of the gospel than to be sitting at Jesus' feet. It is best when we can do both; but, sometimes, the practical duty of serving our fellow-men must take the first place. Happy are they who give themselves to this work, telling to others what God has done for them!

40-42. *And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him: for they were all waiting for him. And, behold, there came a man named Jairus, and he was a ruler of the synagogue:*

Notice the word "behold," for this was a wonder that a man so high in position to come to Christ at all, especially one who was in an ecclesiastical position, for he "was a ruler of the synagogue." Usually those who had to do with the synagogue were great despisers of our Lord Jesus; God works great wonders, however, and sometimes the camel does go through the eye of the needle. This man's name was Jair, a common Jewish name, and you will find it was the name of one of the judges recorded in the book of Judges. Note this man's humility, "He fell down at Jesus' feet." The greatest of men must humble themselves before they can obtain mercy.

and he fell down at Jesus' feet, and besought him that he would come into his house:

Jesus Christ is always ready to receive, to accept, and bless all those who fall down at his feet, but those who lift up themselves shall find him to be their sure and swift, enemy, and the day shall come when he shall abase them to the dust. "He besought him that he would come into his house, for he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a-dying."

42. *For he had one only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay a dying. But as he went the people thronged him.*

She seems to have been not only the darling of the house, but of all the neighbors too for we find that all the neighbors came together to weep and to lament her. You find Matthew says that this daughter was already dead.

It seems that some delay arose, so that the child died, but the father, with triumphant faith, still besought him to come and raise her, even from the very jaws of death.

43, 44. *And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, Came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanched.*

This disease laughs at the physicians, and whenever a cure has been effected it has always been a slew one. Hence the supernatural character of this cure, "Immediately her issue of blood stanched." This is the glory of our blessed religion, that it heals sin-sick souls at once and upon the spot. The moment a man believes in Jesus, his nature is changed; he becomes a new creature: in that moment all his sins are gone: in that same hour he becomes heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ. "Immediately."

45. *And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Pete? and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me?*

What impudence on their part! Doubtless there are many things we say of our Lord, and even to him in prayer, that are very far from such words as he should have from his disciples. There were many who touched him out of curiosity, and doubtless some out of want of respect to his person came too close to him, but there was only one who touched him with the finger of faith, which was the only true touch.

46. *And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me.*

Here are we tonight, dear friends, a great crowd; and what multitudes of professed worshippers of God there are in many places! They seem to throng the Savior; but, all, how few do really touch him so as to derive healing virtue from him! This humble, simple touch of faith is something above and beyond all the pressure of professed zeal and ardor. This touch Christ recognizes at once, but all the pressing and the squeezing of the crowd goes for nothing.

47. *And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately.*

Here is a second confessor. First, there was a man healed; now, here is a woman healed. Both sexes may now hear from them what Christ can do. If they will not believe, oh, then, their unbelief is sad indeed!

48. *And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace.*

Faith crowns Christ, and, therefore, Christ takes the crown off his own head and puts it upon the head of faith. “Thy faith hath saved thee.” Christ’s virtue would not have saved her without her faith, and certainly her faith could not have saved her without Christ’s virtue. We ought to note how vital faith is to true salvation, and what a high degree of importance is attached to it. Let us, therefore, if we have some degree of faith, pray for more, “Lord, increase our faith, for if a little of it may heal, what may not a great faith do?

49. *While he yet spoke, there cometh one from the ruler of the synagogue’s house, saying to him, Thy daughter is dead; trouble not the Master.*

As if such a suppliant really did trouble him! Still, if you have been praying long, and your case appears to be hopeless, despair will whisper, “Trouble not the Master.” But Christ is never troubled by our prayer; it is our want of prayer that troubles him. Even after the worst has come to the worst, we shall never

trouble him if we continue our prayers. But if, on any account, we cease from them, then indeed is his heart grieved.

50. *But when Jesus heard it, he answered him, saying, Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole.*

“Believe only.” What a depth lies in those two words! Believe only! Ah! Lord, it ought to be the easiest thing in the world to believe thee, for thou art so truthful; thou keepest every promise to us, and yet sometimes when we are in the dark, and when circumstances go contrary to us, it is hard to believe; but is not the hardness in our own hearts? Believe only! Christian, what is your trouble this morning, what is your trial? Believe only, and let your humble faith cast your burdens upon your God. “Believe only, and she shall be made whole.”

51. *And when he came into the house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden.*

For Christ does not make a parade of his miracles. He loves to do his work quietly; and they that make a great noise must mind that they do not get put out when Christ is about to work a cure.

52. *And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth.*

They were so sure she was dead that they had actually hired the minstrels for her funeral—so Mark tells us—and the pipers, and the women that made those strange, Oriental lamentations were there, ready to inter her.

53, 54. *And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And he put them out, and took her by the hand, and called saying, Maid, arise.*

But Christ put them all out. They laughed him to scorn, and, therefore, he would

not work the miracle in their presence. It is not meet to east pearls before swine.

55. *And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat.*

Do note here the word “straightway.” Just now we had the word immediately, and now we have straightway. It is one of the distinguishing features of the gospel, both of Mark and of Luke, that both evangelists use the word “eutheos,” “straightway.” Christ’s miracles do not take a long time to do; they are done straightway. If there is a distressed soul here now, your salvation need not take months and years; it may be done today, and in a moment thou mayest be able to rejoice that thy sins are forgiven, and that thou art a child of God. “She arose straightway, and he commanded to give her meat.” There are no unnecessary miracles. It wanted a miracle to give her life, but meat could sustain it, and, therefore, there is no further miracle performed.

56. *And her parents were astonished: but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.*

For Jesus did not wish, at least at that time, to have the story of his miracles blazed abroad. Of him the prophet had long before written: “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.”

Luke 9

1, 2. *Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.*

See the way of making apostles. They were first disciples, and afterwards teachers of others: they were specially his, and then they were given to be a blessing to men. They were “called together”; and thus their higher call came to them. In the presence of their Lord they received their equipment: “and gave them power.” Is that so with us in our own special office? Let us come to him, that we may be clothed with his authority and girded with his strength.

Their power was miraculous; but it was an imitation of their Lord’s, and the words applied to it are very much the same as we have seen in use about his miracles of healing. The twelve were made to represent their Lord. We, too, may be enabled to do what Jesus did among men. Oh, for such an endowment!

3. *And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece.*

They would not need to pay for food or lodging: the people would entertain them freely, and therefore they required no form of money; not even a copper. They needed not to carry a wallet; for meals would be generously offered them by those whom they instructed and healed. They were not to load themselves with extra clothing; for if the weather should require it, the people would supply it: even if their shoes wore out, their hearers would see them shod. When a ministry is really acceptable, the preacher will not be left to suffer want as to the absolute necessaries of life. They needed not even wait to find a staff; for if one was

required, and they set off without it, one would be given.

Among a willing people, such a mission is not only possible, but it is in the highest degree suitable. It is but right and just that people should support in temporals those who minister to them in spirituals, and it is right that plans should be adopted which cast this duty upon them, as in this case. The preacher is to preach freely; but those who are benefited are also freely to find meat for him. Such a mission as this is not a mission to the heathen in any sense. Its methods are good for itself, but they would not be possible among hostile tribes: in the case of work among opponents, our Lord's command under other circumstances is to be followed. See Luke 22:36: "He that hath a purse, let him take it," etc. Different modes of procedure are to be adopted at different times. Oh, that some of our very spiritual brethren had a little common-sense! We offer the prayer with very faint heart.

4, 5. *And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them.*

Disclaim all fellowship with those who will not have fellowship with your Lord. Be not angry; do not denounce with bitterness; just "shake off the very dust from your feet," and go elsewhere. Don't depart to rail at the people in private; but let them know that you quit them because they refuse your message. Do this openly, and in the most solemn and instructive manner, hoping that your departing act may be remembered. It is to be feared that we treat rejectors of Christ in a sadly biding manner, and do not hold up their rejection of our King to the detestation it deserves. We ought to let impenitent sinners know that we consider them out of our fellowship. If they will not hear, we must make them see that we disown them, and count them to be unclean, because they refuse Christ Jesus. How little of this is done by the smooth-tongued preachers of today! Men may refuse their gospel, and still be the bosom friends of those who preach to them. Yea, they try even from the pulpit to cheer them in their impenitence by the dream of a "larger hope."

6 -9. *And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the gospel, and healing every where. Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all*

that was done by him: and he was perplexed, because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead; and of some, that Elias had appeared; and of others, that one of the old prophets was risen again. And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him.

"John" was written on the tyrant's memory; and now that he is startled by a rumor of wonders being done, he cries out, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead." Herod was a Sadducee by profession, but his terror made his skeptical creed crumble to dust. For John at least he believes that there is a resurrection. Great superstition often underlies a surface of avowed unbelief. Herod Antipas had a quarter of his father's kingdom, and less than a quarter of his ability; but in selfish cruelty he was a true cub of the old wolf. He had enough conscience to scare him, though not enough to change him. Note how he believed in the power of a risen man: "Therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him." If from mere hearsay Herod attributed such power to our Lord on earth, shall we not believe in the Almighty power of our risen Lord upon his throne in glory?

10. *And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.*

He knew the absolute need of privacy, and he strove after it. The discreet use of solitude has yet to be learned by many workers.

11. *And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing.*

The multitude would not permit him to be at rest: they were curious, anxious, necessitous; and so they were soon after him. It is a happy sign when there is an eagerness to hear the Word of God. The Lord send us more of it in these days of religious indifference.

He was not angry at the great multitude, nor did he show disappointment at being balked in his pursuit of quiet; but he was moved with compassion. They came unasked, he received them tenderly, he blessed them graciously, and at length fed them bountifully. He was as a stag that fled from the huntsmen; but they had overtaken him, and he yielded himself to them. To those who needed him most he attended first: “He healed them that had need of healing”! Lord, heal thou me, for I am sick in soul, if not in body!

12. *And when the day began to wear away, then came the twelve, and said unto him, Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge, and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place.*

The disciples had the compassion of men who see the need; but to their human thought there seemed but one poor way out of it, namely, in effect to shirk the difficulty by sending the multitudes away. The short way out of a perplexity is generally a very poor affair. To this day many Christians get no further than leaving the masses to themselves, or to some unknown influences which may turn up. One thing was wise in the disciples; they did bring the matter to Jesus: “When the day began to wear away, then came the twelve.” They represented the place as barren, the time as late, the people as many, their needs as great: they were well posted up in all discouraging matters. The proposed course of action was the one weak point in the representation. Our schemes are for the most part wretched affairs. It is almost a wonder that we dare to state them. Do we forget that our Lord Jesus hears our sorry proposals?

13. *But he said unto them, Give ye them to eat.*

“Give ye them to eat”: you talk of their buying for themselves, but they are penniless, and cannot buy. Everything must be free, or they will starve; you are the men to feed them freely; get at it. Begin at once.

And they said, We have no more but five loaves and two fishes; except we should go and buy meat for all this people.

See how they overhaul their provisions; and they report, “We have here but five

loaves." With what a gloomy "but" they show how lean is the larder! Those two sardines make the stock seem positively ridiculous. It is a good thing for us to know how very poor we are, and how far from being able to meet the wants of the people around us. It is for our good to be made to confess this in so many words to our Lord.

Truly, he who writes this comment has often felt as if he had neither loaf nor fish; and yet for some forty years and more he has been a full-handed waiter at the King's great banquets.

14, 15. *For they were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, Make them sit down by fifties in a company. And they did so, and made them all sit down*

What a Commander-in-Chief Christ is. When he makes a banquet it is not a scramble, it is always orderly, and when there is anything very disorderly it is generally because Christ is not there, if he is there, everything seems to fit into its place.

16. *Then he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed them, and brake, and gave to the disciples to set before the multitude.*

Now that all is in order, the divine Lord takes the slender provision into his blessed hands. By a simple sign he teaches the people whence to expect gracious supplies: "He looked up to heaven." Not without a blessing does the al fresco meal begin: "He blessed." God's blessing must be sought even when Jesus is there: He will not act without the Father. Our Lord Jesus did all in the provision of the feast: he blessed, he brake, he gave to his disciples. All is with him.

The disciples come in to take their subordinate position, after he has displayed his divine creatorship. They are the waiters: they serve and distribute; they can do no more; they are glad to do that. In haste, but yet in order, they divide the food among the throng, much wondering and adoring as they so do. It was bread and a relish with it; good fare and agreeable; sufficient, but not luxurious. Some would give the poor only the barest necessaries; bread only; our Lord adds fish. What a feast was this! Christ for Master of the feast: apostles for butlers;

thousands for numbers; and miracles for supplies! What a far more glorious feast is that which the gospel spreads for hungry souls! What a privilege to be fed by the Son of God!

17. *And they did eat, and were all filled: and there was taken up of fragments that remained to them twelve baskets.*

No one was neglected, no one refused, no one was too faint, no one left off till he was satisfied, no one needed anything else, no one found that the food did not suit him; for indeed they were all hungry, “and they did all eat.” No one stinted himself, or was stinted, all “were filled.” Ours is a filling Benefactor, and he provides filling food.

After the feast, twelve great baskets wore needed to hold the fragments. It was impossible to exhaust the store. The baskets were full as well as the people. There was more provision after the feeding than before it. By feeding others our stock increases. That which was left had been blessed as well as that which was eaten, and therefore it was fine food for the disciples. They gave plain bread and fish, and they receive more in quantity, and a blessing to improve the quality. Those who wait upon others at Christ’s bidding shall have a fair portion for themselves. Those who fill others’ mouths shall have their own baskets filled. Everybody is satisfied when Jesus makes the feast.

18. *And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him: and he asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am?*

It was Christ’s usual way, when he took a walk with his disciples, to beguile the time with holy conversation. It would be well if we always did the same. We might do much good, and we might get much good, if we made our Lord Jesus the theme of our talks “by the way.” It was an important question that he put to his disciples, “Whom say the people that I am?”

19. *They answering said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again.*

These wore all conjectures, and far from the mark; yet was there some likeness

to truth in them all. Herod's notion that Jesus was John the Baptist, newly risen from the dead, seemed a probable one to many, since our Lord had like courage and fidelity with John. Elijah, too, seemed to live again in our Lord's words of fire. Since many of these were types of him, it is small wonder that he should seem to be identical with them. Yet men make no discovery of the Lord's true character by their own guesswork: only those to whom he reveals himself will ever know him.

Error has many voices; truth alone is one, and abiding. Men say differing things concerning our Lord; but his Spirit alone bears effectual witness to the one true Christ of God.

20. *He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am*

This is a far more searching question. Our personal thoughts of Jesus touch a vital point. Our Lord presupposes that his disciples would not have the same thoughts as "men" had. They would not follow the spirit of the age, and shape their views by those of the "cultured" persons of the period. They would have formed a judgment, each one for himself, by what they, had heard and seen while in his company. Therefore, he enquired, "But whom say ye that I am?" Let each reader answer the question before he goes further.

Peter answering said, The Christ of God.

Peter, as usual, was spokesman for the rest; and he spoke right well. He had perceived the Messiahship of his Lord, and in outspoken words he uttered his inward belief. It was a simple but satisfactory Confession of Faith. We should always be ready to give an answer to those who would know what we believe on a matter so central as the person and nature of our Lord. A mistake on this point would involve all our religion in failure. If he is not to us the Christ, the Lord's Anointed, we know not Jesus aright.

21. *And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing;*

He wished, at that time, to remain in comparative retirement; he was not anxious

that his miracles should be blazoned abroad. By-and-by, he was to die; and he preferred to derive his fame from his death rather than from his life, and to gather his honors from his cross rather than from his miracles. He never bade any man to be silent about his death on the cross; but when honor was likely to come to him among men from his miracles, he frequently "commanded them to tell no man that thing." That restriction is no longer in force; it was entirely abrogated after our Lord's resurrection, when he said to his disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

22. *Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.*

Our Lord began to prepare his disciples for the time when they would have to act alone, because he would be taken from them. Their first great trial would be his death, of which he had spoken darkly before. There is a fit time for painful disclosures, and our Lord is wise in selecting it. He mentions the gathering together of his foes: "elders and chief priests and scribes" will eagerly unite. Their fury will show itself in multiplied cruelties: he will suffer many things. He declares that they will push their enmity to the bitter end; he will "be killed." He foretells that he will "be raised again" and he specifies the time, namely, "the third day." All this must have fallen sadly on the ears of men who still indulged visions of a kingdom of a very different sort. The most of them were wisely silent in their sadness, yet there was one who had far too bold a tongue.

23. *And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*

As our Lord, to fulfill his destiny, must sacrifice himself, so also must every one who would be his follower. To keep close to our Lord (which he intends by the words "come after me,") we must have done with self; for he denied himself to redeem his people. We must not know self, nor assent to it; but we must each one "deny himself." Doing this, each man must cheerfully shoulder his own personal burden of sorrow and service, and carry it with self-sacrifice, as Jesus

carried his cross.

He had told them of his cross; now he tells them of their own crosses. They might now choose again whether they could and would follow him. With their increased information as to his destiny, the question was again set before them, whether they would follow or forsake him. If they did continue to be his followers, it must be as cross-bearers and self-deniers. Nor are the terms altered in these days. Do we accept them? Can we keep step in the long procession of cross-carriers, or will we fall in with the spirit of the age, and say fine things about Jesus, while we deny his substitutionary sacrifice, and shirk the personal self - denial which he demands? Our own wisdom, if it leads us to think lightly of “the precious blood”, must be utterly denied and even abhorred.

24. *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*

Now they were to practice the doctrine he had taught them before. They could only save their real selves by the loss of this present life; but if they settled it in their own minds that they must first and foremost save their outer life, it would be at the expense of their truest being. To tell them plainly of this was honest dealing on our Lord’s part; and it argued well for the disciples that they still remained faithful to him. Alas! there was one even of the chosen twelve who probably at this very moment was scheming how he could continue to keep the bag, and yet could ultimately escape from the consequences of his Master’s demand.

25. *For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?*

If he loses his real life, how can he profit, even if the world be his? The true gain or loss is a gain or loss of life. All external things are trifles compared with that life. Even now, “What is a man advantaged?” He has no real life in Christ, and what is all else that he may possess? What but a painted pageantry with which he is amusing his soul upon the brink of hell? As to the world to come, there is no question. To lose eternal life is overwhelming loss indeed. Nothing can be compared with eternal life. The soul’s value cannot be estimated by ordinary reckonings. Worlds on worlds were a poor price.

26. *For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed,*

What a grave warning is this for the cowardly believer! Can a non-confessing faith save? To live and die without confessing Christ before men is to run an awful risk. Actually to recant and give up Christ must be a dreadful crime, and the penalty is fearful to contemplate. Disowned by Jesus before his Father who is in heaven! What hell can be worse?

You must be able to say distinctly, I am not ashamed to avow that my heart is given to Jesus the crucified. As he espoused my cause publicly before a gazing world, so I espouse his. I his cross have taken, all else to leave, if it be necessary, that I may fob him. He is my Lord, to him I will submit; he is my trust, on him I lean; he is my hope, for him I look." Do not try the plan which some are attempting, of being Christians in the dark. Put on Christ.

when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.

There will come a day when Christ, from the judgment-seat, will make it appear who was wise in his way of life; for then shall the reward or the punishment throw its light on the past conduct of men. He who was himself despised shall be the Rewarder of those who laid down their lives for the sake of his cause. In that day the crucified "Son of man shall come in glory": that glory will be seen to be "the glory of his Father"; that divine glory will be illustrated by hosts of attendant angels.

27. *But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.*

So near was that reign which would repay the losses of the saints for Christ's sake, that before certain of them were dead the Lord would have held a rehearsal of it in his judgment of Israel, by the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and would have set up his kingdom, of which the judgment- seat is an index and an instrument.

We have here a difficult passage, and this appears to be the simplest way of reading it in its connection. Our Lord seems to say, “Through suffering and death I pass to a throne; and by that fact it shall be seen that loss and death are often the way to true gain and real life. That kingdom of mine is not far away and unreal: some of you will see me in the exercise of my royal power before you die.

Yet it has been thought that it means that some would never really taste of death, or know the fullness of its terrible meaning, till the judgment day. This is true, but it can scarcely be the teaching in this place.

28. *And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.*

The three were elect out of the elect, and favored to see what none else in all the world might behold. Doubtless our Lord had reasons for his choice, as he has for every choice he makes; but he does not unveil them to us. The same three beheld the agony in the garden; perhaps the first sight was necessary to sustain their faith under the second.

The name of the “high mountain” can never be known; for those who knew the locality have left no information. Tabor, if you please; Hermon, if you prefer it. No one can decide. It was a lone and lofty hill.

29. *And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering.*

The splendor of the Lord shone out. His face, lit up with its own inner glory, became a sun; and all his dress, like clouds irradiated by that sun became white as the light itself. “He was transfigured before them”: he alone was the center of what they saw. It was a marvelous unveiling of the hidden nature of the Lord Jesus. Then was, in one way, fulfilled the word of John: “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.”

The transfiguration occurred but once: special views of the glory of Christ are not enjoyed every day. Our highest joy on earth is to see Jesus. There can be no greater bliss in heaven; but we shall be better able to endure the exceeding bliss

when we have laid aside the burden of this flesh.

30, 31. *And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.*

Thus the Law and the Prophets, “Elias with Moses”, communed with our Lord, talking with Jesus; and entering into familiar conversation with their Lord. Saints long departed still live; live in their personality; are known by their names; and enjoy near access to Christ. It is a great joy to holy ones to be with Jesus: they find it heaven to be where they can talk with him. The heads of former dispensations conversed with the Lord as to his decease, by which a new economy I would be ushered in. After condescending so long to his ignorant followers, it must have been a great relief to the human soul of Jesus to talk with two master-minds like those of Moses and Elijah. What a sight for the apostles, this glorious trio!

32, 33. *But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.*

The sight spoke to the three beholders, and they felt bound to answer to it. Peter must speak. That which is uppermost comes out: “Master, it is good for us to be here.” Everybody was of his opinion. Who would not have been? Because it was so good, he would fain stay in this beatific state, and get still more good from it. But he has not lost his reverence, and therefore he would have the great ones sheltered suitability. He offers that, with his brethren, he will plan and build shrines for the three holy ones: “Let us make three tabernacles.” He does not propose to build for himself, and James, and John; but he says, “One for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.”

His talk sounds rather like that of a bewildered child. He wanders a little; yet his expression is a most natural one. Who would not wish to abide in such society as

this? Moses, and Elias, and Jesus: what company! But yet how unpractical is Peter! How selfish the one thought, “It is good for us!” What was to be done for the rest of the twelve, and for the other disciples, and for the wide, wide world? A sip of such bliss might be good for the three, but to continue to drink thereof might not have been really good even for them. Peter knew not what he said. The like might be said of many another excited utterance of enthusiastic saints.

34, 35. *While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.*

The voice was clear and distinct. First came the divine attestation of the Sonship of our Lord, “This is my beloved Son.” What happiness for us that Jehovah is well pleased in Christ, and with all who are in him! Then followed the consequent divine requirement, “Hear him.” It is better to hear the Son of God than to see saints, or to build tabernacles. This will please the Father more than all else that love can suggest.

The good pleasure of the Father in the Lord Jesus is a conspicuous part of his glory. The voice conveyed to the ear a greater glory than the luster of light could communicate through the eye. The audible part of the transfiguration was as wonderful as the visible; in fact, it would seem, from the next verse, to have been more so.

36. *And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone.*

Unhappy, indeed, would they have been if they had looked about and seen none but Moses, for poor comfort could Moses bring. Or if, looking around, they had seen none but Elias, for the stern prophet of fire would have been but a poor consolation to them in their life struggles. But Moses may go, and Elijah may go. Lawgiver and prophet may vanish so long as Jesus Christ remains it is enough. Jesus only is enough for all our wants—for all our desires.

And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

You see the great modesty and patience of our Lord. Though these three favored apostles might see his glory, and afterwards bear witness concerning it, yet for the time being they must hold their tongues. All this glory, and only three men to see it, and these three must be quite silent!

Our Lord seeketh not honor from men; neither ought we to do so. His mind was even then occupied with thoughts of his great sacrifice. When he spoke to Moses and Elias, his theme was, “his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem,” and when he spoke with these three eyewitnesses of his majesty, the subject of his converse was his own death and resurrection. That was the object on which his heart’s affection was set.

37–40. *And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met him. And, behold, a man of the company cried out saying, Master, I beseech thee, leek upon my son: for he is mine only child. And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him. And I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and they could not.*

Down from communion with saints, and the confirmation of his claims by the Father’s voice, our Lord comes to give battle to the devil. Our Moses descends from the mount, and finds evil exultant in the multitude below. During his absence, the enemy had triumphed over his feeble followers. In the midst of jeering adversaries, the disciples had tried in vain to cast out an evil spirit from a youth who had been rendered lunatic by its horrible possession. The poor disappointed father appeals to the Lord at once most humbly, states the case clearly, and pleads most fittingly. His epileptic son was a lunatic, sore sexed with pain, and in grievous peril through sudden falls. The case was a shocking one to have in one’s presence: the cries and contortions which attend epilepsy are frequently terrible to hear and see. The disciples had evidently done their very best; and as they had on other occasions cast out devils, they were surprised to find themselves defeated; but defeated they were, for the despairing father truthfully cried, “I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and they could not.” Alas, poor man, thou didst but speak as all have done since, when they have trusted in disciples, and not alone in their Master!

41. *And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you Bring thy son hither.*

If you have been praying for some dear one, and the devil is not cast out, but the one for whom you have pleaded seems to be worse rather than better, notwithstanding all your prayers and all your efforts, hear the Master himself saying to you tonight, as he said to the father of this child, “Bring thy son hither.”

42. *And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him.*

This is Satan’s usual way. Whenever he is about to be cast out of anyone, he grows angry; and if he cannot destroy, he will worry, just as a bad tenant will do injury to the house if he cannot any longer keep possession of it. “As he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him.”

Perhaps I speak to some tonight who are coming to Christ, and yet have worse fears than ever. They are more troubled than ever they were before.

Well, you are like this poor child: “As he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him.” It was, however, the devil’s last throw.

And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father.

How well it is done, bow perfectly it is done, how easily it is done, how quickly it is done when Christ comes on the scene! Let us pray distinctly tonight for those who have been our failures hitherto. They will not he Christ’s failures if in prayer and by faith we bring them to him.

43, 44. *And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God.*

But while they were amazed, many of them did not believe. It is one thing to be astonished, it is another thing to be humbled, and to be led to simple faith in Christ. Never be content with any emotion but that which leads you to believe in

Jesus for yourself.

But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.

Just after the transfiguration, just after he had east out the devil, he tells his disciples that “the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.”

The shadow of the cross fell upon Christ long before the substance of the cross was on his shoulder. He never forgot that the day would come when he must lay down his life as a ransom for many, and he never started back from it, either.

“This was compassion like a God,
That when the Savior knew
The price of pardon was his blood,
His pity ne’er withdrew.”

45. *But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying.*

They were not as yet spiritual enough to spy out his meaning; and when they had even a faint glimmering of it, it made them feel so sad, so cast down, that they did not dare to go and ask him fully to explain it. Do not you think that you and I may have, to-might, something pressing upon us that would all vanish if we but took it to Jesus? And yet we fear to ask him of that saying. Let us drive away that fear, and he familiar with our Lord, and tell him everything that vexes our spirit.

46. *Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest.*

Sad, sad, sad, a hundred times sad! When he was talking of his death, and of his being delivered into the hands of wicked men, his disciples were disputing as to who should be the greatest. Ah, brethren, but we may be guilty of quite as great an inconsistency. If, after Christ’s death for us on the cross, and after he has

given up everything for us, and has washed us in his hearts blood, if we begin to want to he great and famous in the eyes of men, what wretches we are! May God deliver us from all ambition, from every kind of self-seeking, and from any measure of pride! Otherwise, we are inconsistent in pretending to follow such a Master as the Lord Jesus.

47, 48. *And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, and said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.*

The way to rise in the ranks of Christ, is to go down. Be willing to do the meanest thing, and you are growing in Christ's esteem. When you are great, you are little. When you are nothing, then are you great. The Lord take away from us the black drops of pride that make us stand up on our dignity, and think we must be somebody! Somebody? God will not use you as long as you are somebody; but when you are nobody, then will God greatly magnify you, and use you in his Church.

49. *And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us.*

This man who was casting out demons was a dissenter, he was not with the regular church. He was doing good; but still, what right had he to do it? John said, "He followeth not with us." He was outside the pale; and even John, with all his loving disposition, felt that he must blow that candle out. He had no right to shine in anything but the regular, orthodox candlestick. "We forbad him, because he followeth not with us."

50. *And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.*

Jesus also said that no man could do a miracle in his name, and then lightly go

and speak evil of him; so that it was for the good of the cause to let the irregular practitioner go on with this business. Besides, if anybody can cast a devil out, by all means let him do it; for there is none too much of the power of casting out devils; and, remember, that these gentlemen who found fault, could not cast the devil out themselves. They had been beaten in this very task; and yet, when somebody else did it in the power of God, they began to complain, and forbid them. That is surely being like the dog in the manger. God save us from falling into that spirit!

51. *And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,*

It is a very remarkable expression that is here used: "when the time was come that he should be received up." It does not say "that he should depart," or "that he should die." It overleaps that, and speaks only of his glorious ascension into heaven. When that time was drawing near—and, of course, his death would come before it—Christ "stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem," where he knew that he should die upon the cross.

52, 53. *And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.*

And, of course, Jerusalem was a sort of rival of Samaria; and if he was going there to worship, they did not want him to stay with them. Yet the Samaritans were believers in the first five Books of the Bible; they accepted the Pentateuch, and they ought therefore to have practiced hospitality, imitating Abraham's noble example. They erred both against their own Scriptures and against the dictates of humanity when they refused to receive Christ because he was on his way to Jerusalem.

54. *And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?*

James and John, two of the most loving of Christ's disciples, John the most loving of all, startle us all by failing in the matter of love, and so being as bad as the Samaritans themselves. I have often noticed that very "liberal minded" people, who denounce bigotry in general, do it with about seven times as much bigotry as those who are out—and-out bigots. In fact, it is a wonderfully easy thing to be a bigot against all bigotry, and to be illiberal towards everybody except fellow-liberals. Well, that is a pity; it is better far to have the spirit of Christ, even when the Samaritans refuse to exercise hospitality. At any rate, let them live.

You notice that John quotes the example of Elijah; and this should teach us that the best men mentioned in Scripture did things which we may not copy, and that they did some things rightly which it would be wrong for us to do. Under special inspiration of God, Elijah, the prophet of fire, may call down fire from heaven; but you and I must not do so; we are not sent for any such purpose. Let us, therefore, be cautious how we make even prophets our exemplars in everything.

55. *But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*

When you read the Old Testament, you will remember that the spirit of the Old Testament was in accordance with the law of Moses; but you are not under the law but under grace, and the spirit of Christ is another spirit, not the spirit of judgment, bringing down fire from heaven, but the spirit of mercy, bringing life and blessing from above.

56. *For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*

If that principle had been always remembered, and followed, there would have been no persecution. To cause a man to suffer in his person, or in his estate, because of his religious opinions, be they what they may, is a violation of Christianity. Consciences belong to God alone; and it is not for us to be calling for fire, the stake, the rack or imprisonment, for men because they do not believe as we do. "The Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

And they went to another village.

That was all Christ did by way of punishment of these Samaritans: he “went to another village.” Yet, gentle as was this treatment, it was really a very severe punishment, such a punishment as will fall on all of you who reject Christ. If you will not receive him, he will go to somebody else. If you will not hear him, somebody else will; and if, when you hear him, you will not accept him, it may be that you will not hear him many times more, the word may never again be spoken with any power to you, but Christ will go to somebody else.

57, 58. *And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*

Was this man charmed by what he heard and saw of our Lord? We think so. In a sudden fit of enthusiasm, he calls him “Lord.” He had probably hurried round the shore after Jesus, and he declares he will always follow him, let the Master go where he may. His is an unreserved discipleship which knows no time or place: “I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.”

His was an unasked-for following, for the Lord had not said to him, “Follow me.” It was the best fruit of nature, but not the result of grace. Our King soon tests this loudly-expressed loyalty, by telling the new convert that he was so poor a master, that beasts of the fields, and “birds of the air”, were better off for lodgings than himself. If the leader fared so badly, there was a poor look-out for the follower. How great was the humiliation of our Lord and King! He had no palace, and no silken canopy. He who was our Head had not where to lay his own head.

59, 60. *And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.*

The first man was too fast, the second was too slow. This person was a disciple: Jesus sent him on a mission; he was not ready to start. He must do something else first. That something had to do with a dead relative. It was a grave fault to

put the sepulcher before the Savior. His father would be sure to be buried by some other member of the family; but no other could obey the command of Christ which this disciple had received. We may leave work which another can do when our Lord appoints us a peculiar personal service. It must be Christ first, and father next. Living commands must take precedence of duties to the dead. Soldiers cannot be excused from war on account of domestic claims.

60. *Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.*

Our Lord repeated his command, “Follow me.” Others could bury the dead; it was for the disciple to obey his orders. Men who are unrenewed are dead, and they are quite able to attend to such dead business as a funeral. Much of the concerns of politics, party tactics, committee meetings, social reforms, innocent amusements, and so forth, may be very fitly, described as burying the dead. Much of this is very needful, proper, and commendable work; but still only such a form of business as unregenerate men can do as well as the disciples of Jesus. Let them do it; but if we are called to preach the gospel, let up give ourselves wholly to our sacred calling. Let not the higher worker entangle himself with what worldlings can do quite as well as he can. “Follow me” is a precept which will need all our powers to carry it out; but by grace we will obey.

61. *And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.*

He is another volunteer; “but let me first.” Something must be done first by him, too. There would have been no hurt in what he said if he had not put in that word “first.” “Let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.” Well, now, the objection to this was that he did not intend to come right straight out from the world. He did not mean to come out there and then for Christ; but he must go home, and bid them farewell first.

We know, first, that this was a very dangerous procedure, because the probability was that, when he went home to bid them farewell, they would get crying over him, so that it would take a month to say farewell, and then he would have to say farewell again, and perhaps keep on saying it all the rest of his life. No man leaves sin little by little. No, there is nothing that will do as an escape from sin

but total abstinence from it, to have done with it, and cut the connection altogether by God's grace, and that without taking a farewell of it.

62. *And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*

When the ploughman starts with his plough, he keeps his eye right in front, looking straight ahead. If his heart is not in his work, every now and then, when he ought to be driving one way, he looks the other, and so he makes his plough boggle, and get out of the rut. On he goes a little way, and then looks back. He ploughs another bit and again looks back. He is a fine ploughman! He will never win the gold medal in a ploughing contest, I am sure. He is not fit to follow the plough at all; he is not up to his work. The ploughman who is always looking here and there and everywhere, instead of looking straight ahead, is a most faulty ploughman.

Now, we want for Christ men and women who will say, "I am for Christ, for him to live, for him to labor, for him to suffer, for him, if need be, to die. Straight ahead, turning neither to the right hand for this that I may gain, nor to the left hand for fear of what I may lose, but straight ahead, by that divine grace which has come into my soul, and made me feel that Christ is all my salvation, and all my desire, straight ahead I plough towards the end of the field." God grant us to have many such converts!

Luke 10

1. *After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.*

Our Lord was about to send out seventy disciples to preach the gospel. He had already chosen his twelve apostles; now there must be seventy disciples, something like Moses had seventy elders to serve under him. Some have fancifully likened these two sets of men to the twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees at Elim; and certainly they were for the refreshment of the people.

They were to go before Christ, and be his heralds. What a mercy it is when the preacher knows that his Master is coming after him, when he can hear the sound of his Master's feet behind him! What courage it gives him! He knows that, though it is very little that he can do, be is the thin end of the wedge preparing the way for One who can do everything.

2. *Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are Jew: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest.*

The seventy were very few compared with the many that were needed. There were many loiterers about then as there are now; but the laborers were few. There were preachers of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and they were not worth a penny a hundred; but the true laborers, who watched for souls, and preached Christ with all their hearts, were very few.

It is the same today; and therefore we are to pray for more laborers. A good minister always desires to see more good ministers. In a trade, every tradesman would be glad if those of the same trade as himself would move to another

parish; but in the profession of a Christian minister, the more the merrier. “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest.”

3. *Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves.*

“Defenceless, harmless, into the midst of those who would devour you if I did not send you. It would be foolhardiness to go on your own account; but IT send you; and he who sends his lambs among wolves will take care of them.” As I have often reminded you, the lambs and the sheep are very defenceless; and yet, after all, there are more sheep in the world than there are wolves; and although it looked as if the wolves would soon devour the sheep, the wolves are extirpated in many a country, and the sheep are still prized; and it will be so till the end.

4. *Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes:*

This time, when Christ sent out the seventy, he bade them take no provision, for they might depend upon the kindness of the people. Afterwards, when he was about to leave his disciples, he bade them take both purse and scrip, for they were going among an unfriendly people; but on this first mission be knew that there was a kindly feeling towards them, so he said, “Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes.”

and salute no man by the way.

Eastern salutations by the way took up a very long time, the people saying a lot of fine nothings to one another. Christian ministers ought to be excused from many of the lengthy courtesies of life; and if they are not excused, if they are faithful, they will take French leave to be excused. We have not time for all those pretty things that some people attend to. If we are to win souls, we must go to work like the king’s couriers, who turn not aside to attend to anything else, but devote all their energies to the mission on which they are sent.

5, 6. *And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it:*

if not, it shall turn to you again.

So that it will not be wasted. Wish well, and your well-wishing will do you good, even if it does nobody else good. Our chickens come home to roost.

If they be curses, they will come upon ourselves; if they be blessings, they will bless ourselves as well as others.

7, 8. *And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, cut such things as are set before you:*

The Jewish Rabbis, in their perambulations, were very particular about food; it is said to have been very difficult to find a dish to their taste. This might be unclean in one way, and that not up to the mark in another; but here the Master exempts his ambassadors from attention to these minor matters. They had something better to do than to be always careful about what they should eat or what they should drink, so he said to them, “Eat such things as are set before you.”

9–11. *And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.*

We are not to stop and argue; that is no business of ours. We have to tell our message. If men will receive it, we are glad; if they will not hear it, with a heavy heart we turn aside, and go elsewhere. Our work is to proclaim the glorious message of mercy through a dying Savior, salvation through the great atonement; it is our business to proclaim it and leave it, the responsibility of receiving or rejecting it rests with our hearers.

12–14. *But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day*

for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you.

Hearing and rejecting the gospel is the crowning sin of all. Whatever else men are guilty of, if they have not rejected Christ, they have not yet reached the summit of iniquity. The accursed cities of the plain may look for a fearful doom; but their portion will not be so unbearable as that of those to whom the gospel comes in freest fashion; and yet they will not receive its messengers, nor even hear their words. With what solemnity do these threatenings surround both the preaching and the hearing of the kingdom!

Here our ever-blessed King sends forth his royal ambassadors under orders to summon the Jewish nation to own their sovereign Lord; and he supports them in their errand by a tremendous threat of doom to those who will not receive them, or listen to their words.

15, 16. *And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.*

If the messenger delivers his message correctly, and as his Master would have him deliver it, the rejection of it, when brought by him, has the same guilt in it as the rejection of Christ himself, and the rejection of Christ is the rejection of God; so Jesus tells us here.

17. *And the seventy returned again with joy,*

Not one of the lambs had been eaten by the wolves.

saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.

Christ had not mentioned that in the commission. He sent them to heal the sick. The casting out of devils was included, no doubt, but it was not specifically mentioned; and this being an extra beyond the words of their commission, they were especially delighted with it Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name."

18–20. *And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.*

That is a higher privilege than to be master over demons, or to be able to tread on serpents. That day of miracles is past; but the power of the gospel is a spiritual power the same as before. We still cast out devils; still are men delivered from the dominion of Satan.

21, 22. *In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father;*

You know that he is the Son of God; you know that he is Jesus of Nazareth; but you do not know him, you cannot know him, as his Father knows him. He is known in his fullness only to the Father.

and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.

"Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" No, thou canst not. The Son of God must reveal his Father to thee, or thou wilt never know him.

23. *And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

Happy men to be chosen to such a privilege! Grace has opened your eyes and ears. Blessed are your eyes, for they see. What wonders, treasures, revelations do they see! Eyes are blessed which gaze upon the mysteries of divine love. Blessed are your ears, for they hear; hear something sweeter than the song of angels, even the voice of everlasting love from the heart of Jesus. You have learned the great secret; the counsel of the Lord has been revealed to you, and you are blessed. You under the gospel are made to know what the greatest and best of men under the law could not discover. The shortest day of summer is longer than the longest day in winter; and you, ye humble ones, under the gospel dispensation see more of truth in Jesus than the best of saints could see before he came. There is no doubt about this, for Jesus sets the seal of — "Verily I say unto you" upon the statement Favored above all others are those whose regenerated faculties both see and hear the truth of God. Are we among this blessed number? If so, let us praise the Lord for so great a boon. Truly to hear the gospel and to see its blessings is a high favor. The love and gratitude which we show in return should be great indeed!

25, 26. *And, behold a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?*

That was a most appropriate answer to a lawyer. "You ask me what you should do; well, you profess to be a teacher of the law, you ought, therefore, to know what is written in the law."

27, 28. *And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.*

This lawyer was one of those people who know the law, yet do it not. No doubt Jesus struck the nail on the head when he gave him that very pertinent answer, “This do, and thou shalt live.” This lawyer was trying to live by teaching the law, by his knowledge of it, but Christ insists that nothing will do but a practical carrying out of its precepts.

29. *But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?*

He probably meant to say, “I have not any neighbours; I have no near relations; my father and mother are dead and gone, I have no brothers and sisters, and therefore I may be excused from the duty of loving anyone else as I love myself.” Jesus did not answer the lawyer’s question, “Who is my neighbour?” He did not turn the eyes of the man to the poor mendicants who needed charity, but he made him look at himself.

30. *And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.*

It was a very dangerous road, a very lonely part, and robberies were very frequent there.

31. *And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.*

He did not like the look of wounds and blood. It is a very convenient thing not to recollect the miseries of your fellow-men. Do not think about their poverty: it might spoil your digestion. Do not think about their drunkenness: you might have to become a teetotaller. Do not think about their sin: you might have to go and preach in the street to them. You can live so easily and pleasantly, and even be a priest and be called “His Reverence,” if you are very careful which side of the road you take. “He passed by on the other side.”

32. *And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked*

on him and passed by on the other side.

There are some whose looks are evidently esteemed by themselves to be so very precious, that, when they have given them, they give nothing more.

He may have meant, “I will see into it.” There are a great many who are very diligent in their promises to see into a case, but we do not see much come of what they say. They also pass by on the other side. Neither the priest nor the Levite acted as a neighbor to the man who fell among thieves.

33. *But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was:*

He looked, approached, drew near, “came where he was.”

and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

He did not ask him how he got there, or say to him, ‘Why, man, you must have been very foolish to travel alone. My dear friend, next time you come this way, you must come armed. Did you not know this was a very ugly part of the road? And I think you are ill-advised to have been travelling quite so late.” Oh, we have many dear friends who always favor us with their rebukes when our wounds are bleeding! “He had compassion on him.”

34. *And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.*

Oil and wine-two very good things for external application, and he used them for that. Wondrous healers these were known to be. They were expensive things too. He had brought them for his own comfort, and he freely used them for this poor man. Then he set him on his own beast; so he had to walk himself. He took the inconvenience. He relinquished his own comfort for the sake of doing good. “And he brought him to an inn and took care of him,” perhaps sat up at night with him, he took care of him after he had got him into the inn. He did not immediately commend him to the care of some paid person, but at first he took care of him. But this good Samaritan had urgent business, and was obliged to go

about it.

35. *And on the morrow when he departed he took out two pence and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.*

"This is my piece of work. I want to finish it, and as I cannot stop will you kindly supply the ready money, and when I come again, I will repay you?"

36, 37. *Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him.*

Oh, you lawyer, why did you not say "The Samaritan"? Of course, he did not like to use that word. Oh, no, we never mention them—the "Samaritans." "The Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans;" so he would not honestly say "The Samaritan"; but he made a roundabout of it and said, "He that shewed mercy on him."

Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Here was a dismission, and here was a commission too. Jesus dismissed him. "I have nothing more to say to you; 'Go.'" Here was the commission: "Do thou likewise." Alas! I am afraid that, after most sermons people get the dismission: "Go;" but they forget the commission: "Go, and do thou likewise." It is your privilege as well as your duty, O Christians, to assist the needy; and whenever you discover distress, as far as lieth in you, to minister practically to its relief.

38. *Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house.*

There were not so very many that kept open house for Christ. But Martha did. It was her house.

39. *And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.*

She was free to do so. It was not her house. She need not attend to the hospitalities of it. Her sister was quite equal to it, and so Mary did well to avail herself of the opportunity of sitting at Jesus' feet, and hearing his word.

40. *But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.*

She wanted to get so much ready—to have everything nice. So she came almost scolding the Master. She was out of temper, surely, that day. She had got to be troubled. Dear friends, it is not wrong to labor and to work and do all we can, but it is wrong to grow cumbered with it—to get fretful, anxious, worried about this thing and that. You will not do it any better.

You will probably do less, and you will do it worse. She was "cumbered about much serving."

41, 42. *And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful:*

"Thou hast forgotten much. Looking after many things, thou hast failed to remember the chief, the only needful thing."

42. *And Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

And so he let her still sit there, and hear his blessed words. "Oh, that I could for ever sit With Mary at the Master's feet Be this my happy choice!"

Luke 11

1. *And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach me to pray, as John also taught his disciples.*

It seemed to this disciple as if he did not know how to pray after he had heard Christ pray. The prayer of Jesus was so infinitely above anything that he had ever reached that he said, “Lord, teach us to pray;” and, as if he felt that he needed a precedent for asking such hallowed instruction, he said, Teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” We must all feel that if we are to pray aright, we must be taught of God, by his Holy Spirit. We are full of infirmities, and if there is any time when our infirmities are felt most, it is when we engage in prayer, but “the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as are ought.” Let us, then, breathe this prayer to our great Teacher, “Lord, teach us to pray.”

2. *And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will he done, as in heaven, so in earth.*

When we come to God in prayer, we are apt to think first of our own necessities, but if we came aright, in the spirit of sonship, truly saying, “Our Father who art in heaven,” we should begin our prayer like this, “‘Hallowed be thy name.’ May all men honor, reverence, and adore thy holy name. ‘Thy kingdom come.’ We are not satisfied that thou shouldst be anything less than king; our heart’s desire is, ‘Reign, gracious God over us and over all men.’ ‘Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.’ ‘Thy will be done,’ rather than ours.”

Now comes a prayer for ourselves—

3. *Give us day by day our daily bread.*

"Give us, O Lord, what we really need; not that which would be a luxury, but that which is a necessity. 'Give us,' according as we shall need it day by day, what we shall then actually need, 'our daily bread.'" We are not warranted in asking much more than this in temporal matters. They are all comprehended in this petition as far as they are necessary, but God has not given us carte blanche to ask for wealth, or honor, or any such dangerous things. There is no harm in asking for bread, and he will give us that.

4. *And forgive us our sins;*

We also need to pray this prayer; I do not think that our Savior ever anticipated a time when his disciples on earth would not need to pray,

"Forgive us our sins."

for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation;

"Lord, do not try us and test us more than is absolutely necessary, for we are so apt to fall: 'Lead us not into temptation;' but, if we must be tempted,"—

deliver us from evil.

"If some good end is to be answered by our being thus tested, then let it be so, but, O Lord, 'deliver us from evil,' and especially from the evil one; suffer us not to fall into his hands in the hour of temptation."

5, 6. *And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him;*

This man was in a sad plight; his friend was faint and hungry, and he himself was willing enough to entertain him, but he had “nothing to set before him.” So he acts very wisely; he goes to a friend, and asks him to lend him three loaves.

7. *And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.*

If the man outside keeps on knocking, if he will not go away without the bread he wants for his friend, what will happen?

8. *I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.*

See the power of importunate prayer; and you, beloved, can have all that you really need for yourselves or others if you will only ask for it in the right way. If, summoning every faculty of your being, you resolve to plead, and plead, and plead yet again and again, and never take “No” for an answer, your heart’s desire shall be granted.

9. *And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you;*

But if asking does not seem to prevail with God—

seek, and ye shall find;

And if, for a while, you do not find, come closer in—

knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

There are different methods of praying, and each one has its special adaptation to the state in which you may be; so use that method to which the Holy Spirit guides you, so use all methods until you prevail.

10-13. *For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone?*

There were many stones in those days that were in appearance wonderfully like the bread which they used in the East; but would any father mock his son by giving him one of those stones to break his teeth on, instead of bread that he could eat? Never.

Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

If you have the Holy Spirit, you virtually have all good gifts, for the Spirit is the earnest of God's love, the pledge of joys to come; and he brings with him all things that are necessary and good for you.

14. *And he was casting out a devil, and it was dumb.*

So that this poor man could not obey the Saviour's teaching. He could not pray, for he was under the influence of a dumb devil. How many of that sort there are still in the world! They cannot speak with God, they have never learned to pray, for they are possessed by a dumb devil.

And it came to pass, when the devil was gone out, the dumb spake; and the people wondered.

When the devil is driven out of men by Christ, they soon begin to pray. The little sentence, "Behold, he prayeth," was the indication of a new birth in Saul of Tarsus. The Lord grant that some here, who have been possessed by a dumb spirit, may be graciously led to pray! Remember, dear friend, that God will hear your prayer the first time you call upon him; and there is a text which says, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

15. *But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils.*

One would hardly have thought that they could have gone to such a length as that; but when men hate Christ, there is nothing they will not say against him. It is no subject of surprise when great heresies arise, for they are the natural outcome of human enmity against Christ and his truth. People in such a state of heart will say anything; they will give utterance to thoughts that you could not have imagined would have entered any human brain; it is the enmity of the heart to Christ that produces this blasphemy of the tongue.

16. *And others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven.*

"You are working this work from beneath," they said, "now do something that is really from above." They must have known that the casting out of the devil was from heaven, for Satan would never cast out Satan.

17, 18. *But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house divided against a house faileth. If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub.*

If Satan cast out Satan, his kingdom would soon come to an end. Note how calmly the Savior met these mockers and cavillers. There is no trace of anger in his words; they said the worst thing they could say about him and his work, and yet, in the coolest manner possible, he closes their mouths in the silence of shame. God grant us grace to be calm and strong even when we are most furiously assailed! It is when we are in a hurry and fret that we grow weak.

19. *And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore shall they be your judges.*

For some of these men had sons, who either did really cast out devils, being disciples of Christ, or else professed to do so, being exorcists, pretending to a

power they did not possess. In either case, the argument was good as against the objectors.

20–22. *But if I with the finger of God cast out devil, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.*

This is how Christ drives out the devil, by sheer force of arms, he overcomes him, and drives him out. He does not cajole him, invite him, or persuade him to go; but he fights with him, puts forth his omnipotent power against him, overthrows him, takes away his armor, and divides the spoil. Were you ever conscious of Hugh's fight as that? If not, be afraid of your so-called reformation, for there is no true reformation, and no true conversion, in which there is no conflict between Christ and Satan.

23. *He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.*

Christ had made no compact with the powers of darkness. He was not casting the demons out with the devil's aid, it was absurd to think that he was. He was fighting them and casting them out by his own divine, omnipotent energy. Now comes a very striking parable—

24. *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man*

Satan does sometimes go out of men entirely of his own accord without being turned out. He goes out for a walk, meaning to go back again. Many a man has left off being a drunkard, or left off being lascivious—for a time: "when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man,"—

he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out.

You see that he still calls it his house. He has gone out for a walk, but he has taken the key of his house with him. Some people sign the pledge, and give up being drunkards for a time, but if the devil is still their master he has only gone away for a while, and he will come back again before long. If he goes out of his own accord, he will come back when he pleases.

25. *And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished.*

There has been a reformation of a sort; the man has given up drunkenness, left off swearing, and become, in certain respects, a better man. The house is swept and garnished, but there is no new tenant of Mansoul, there is no Christ come to take possession of Heart Castle.

26. *Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirit more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.*

It often happens that, when men make a profession of reformation, and then relapse into their former state, they become far worse than they were before. The so-called "reformation" is all of their own doing; or rather, the greater part of it is the devil's doing. The demon within the man voluntarily went away, and now that he comes back, he brings with him "seven other spirits more wicked than himself;" and so the man is more than eight times worse than he was before the demon left him for a while.

27, 28. *And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.*

The enthusiastic woman was so carried away with admiration for Christ that she thought his mother was a highly-favored woman, and she called her "blessed." "Yes," said Christ, "she is blessed; but still more blessed are they who have the Word of God in their hearts, who regard it as their own, and keep it as a great

prize."

29, 30. *And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, There is an evil generation: they seek a sign;*

Look back to the 16th verse: "Others, tempting him, sought of him a sign from heaven." Christ had answered those who imputed his miraculous works to Satanic agency, now he answers these others.

How hopeless had the religionists of that age become! Nothing would convince them. They manifest their hate of the Lord Jesus, by ignoring all the wonders he had wrought. What further signs could they seek than those he had already given? Pretty inquirers these! They treat all the miracles of our Lord as if they had never occurred.

and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevite, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.

The great sign of our Lord's mission is his resurrection, and his preparing gospel of salvation for the heathen. His life-story is well symbolized by that of Jonah. They cast our Lord overboard, even as the sailors did the man of God. The sacrifice of Jonah calmed the sea for the mariners; our Lord's death made peace for us. Our Lord was a while in the heart of the earth as Jonah in the depth of the sea; but he rose again, and his ministry was full of the power of his resurrection. As Jonah's ministry was certified by his restoration from the sea, so is our Lord's ministry attested by his rising from the dead. The man who had come back from death and burial in the sea commanded the attention of all Nineveh, and so does the risen Savior demand and deserve the obedient faith of all to whom his message comes.

31. *The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.*

As the fame of Solomon brought the queen of the south from the uttermost parts of the earth, so does the doctrine of our Lord command attention from the utmost isles of the sea. If Israel perceives not his glorious wisdom, Ethiopia and Seba shall hear of it, and come bowing before him. The queen of Sheba will rise again, and will "rise up" as a witness against unbelieving Jews; for she journeyed far to hear Solomon, while they would not hear the Son of God himself who came into their midst. The superlative excellence of his wisdom stands for our Lord as a sign, which can never be effectually disputed. What other teaching meets all the wants of men? Who else has revealed such grace and truth? He is infinitely greater than Solomon, who from a moral point of new exhibited a sorrowful littleness. Who but the Son of God could have made known the Father as he has done?

32. *The men of Nineva shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.*

The heathen of Nineveh were convinced by the sign of a prophet restored from burial in the sea; and moved by that convincement, they repented at his preaching. Without cavil or delay they put the whole city in mourning, and pleaded with God to turn from his anger. Jesus came with a clearer command of repentance, and a brighter promise of deliverance; but he spoke to obdurate hearts. Our Lord reminds the Pharisees of this; and as they were the most Jewish of Jews, they were touched to the quick by the fact that heathens perceived what Israel did not understand, and that Ninevites repented while Jews were hardened. All men will rise at the judgment: "The men of Nineveh shall rise." The lives of penitents will condemn those who did not repent: the Ninevites will condemn the Jews, "because they repented at the preaching of Jonas," and the Jews did not. Those who heard Jonah and repented will be swift witnesses against those who heard Jesus and refused his testimony. The standing witness to our Lord is his resurrection from the dead. God grant that every one of us, believing that unquestionable fact, may be so assured of his mission, that we may repent and believe the gospel.

33. *No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they that come in may see the light.*

We are to remove the darkness of ignorance, sin, and sorrow. Christ has lighted us that we may enlighten the world. It is not ours to lie in concealment as to our religion. To attempt to conceal his Spirit is as foolish as to put a lamp “under a bushel”: the lamp should be seen by “all that come in,” and so should the Christian’s graces. Household piety is the best of piety. If our light is not seen in the house, depend upon it we have none. Candles are meant for parlors and bedrooms.

34, 35. *The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light, but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.*

The motive is the eye of the soul, and if it be clear, the whole character will be right; but if it be polluted, our whole being will become defiled. The eye of the understanding may also be here understood: if a man does not see things in a right light, he may live in sin and yet fancy that he is doing his duty. A man should live up to his light; but if that light is itself darkness, what a mistake his whole course will be! If our religion leads us to sin, it is worse than irreligion.

36, 37. *May thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light. And as he spake, a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him: and he went in, and sat down to meat.*

It was often a master of marvel to the onlookers that Christ went among publicans and sinners; but is it not a greater wonder that he went among Pharisees? If they asked him to their houses, it was usually because they hoped to entangle him in his talk; yet the condescension of our Master is so great that, again and again, “he went in, and sat down to meat.”

38. *And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not just washed before dinner.*

Not because Christ’s hands needed washing, but because it was the custom of the

Pharisees to wash before eating, and our Lord broke through the customs as he was wont to do, for he cared nothing for their inventions.

39, 40. *And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. Ye fool, did not he that made that which is without make that which is within also?*

"One needs washing as much as the other. You are so careful of your hands; will you not be more careful of your hearts?"

41. *But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you.*

"When you are full of love to your fellow-men, and make a practice of helping them, you have cleansed your heart from selfishness, and have really washed yourself then."

42. *But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

How many, in these days, are very particular stout very little things, but very careless about great things! They would not violate the law of their sect or party for the world, but the law of God is of small account to them.

43. *Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets.*

They loved to be called Rabbi, learned Doctors of the law. Any title that made them appear great was very sweet to them.

44. *If so unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not*

aware of them.

Nobody but Christ knew how base they were. They were fair to look upon, but he knew that they were villainously hypocritical, and he therefore denounced them. Ah, dear friends, the great matter is to have grace in the heart—to have the divine light within, in the soul; and if we have not this, vain is a fair profession, vain is everything that comes from man. If we are to be saved, we must have the grace that comes from God alone.

45. *Then answered one of the lawyers, and said unto him, Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also.*

There was no great difference between the scribes and Pharisees and the lawyers, as this man evidently perceived, and as our Lord also soon confirmed by pronouncing upon them the same kind of "Woe" that he had pronounced upon the other false teachers.

46. *And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.*

Their regulations as to moral and ceremonial observances were like huge faggots or crushing burdens bound together, and made into a weight intolerable for any man to carry. Many of these rules by themselves were grievous enough; but altogether they formed a yoke that neither the people nor their fathers could bear. The scribes, and Pharisees, and lawyers piled the great load upon them; but neither helped them to sustain it, nor offered to relieve them of any portion of it. "Ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers."

47, 48. *Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophet, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.*

They pretended to have such regard for the holy men of the past that, being unable to honor them in person, they would set up monuments to their memory, and adorn their resting-places with tokens of respect.

Out of their own mouth our Lord condemned these hypocrites: “Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers.” In effect, Jesus said to them, “You confess that you are the sons of the murderers of the prophets. That admission carries with it far more than you imagine. You are their sons, not only by birth, but also by resemblance; you are veritable children of those who killed the prophets. If you had lived in their day, you would have committed the crimes you pretend to condemn.”

49–51. *Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shalt slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zachariah, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.*

The destruction of Jerusalem was more terrible than anything that the world has ever witnessed, either before or since. Even Titus seemed to see in his cruel work the hand of an avenging God. Truly, the blood of the martyrs was amply avenged when the whole city became a veritable Aceldama, or field of blood. It was before that generation had passed away that Jerusalem was besieged and destroyed. There was a sufficient interval for the full proclamation of the gospel by the apostles and evangelists of the early Christian Church, and for the gathering out of those who recognized the crucified Christ as their true Messiah. Then came the awful ending, which the Savior foresaw and foretold.

52. *Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.*

This “Woe” is similar to that pronounced upon the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, and it was a terrible charge to be brought against them by him who

could read their hearts, and who could truthfully say to them, “Ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered.” They ought to have helped men into the kingdom; instead of doing so, they hindered those who were entering. Are there not false teachers, nowadays, who put stumbling-stones instead of stepping-stones in the way of those who are entering the kingdom of heaven?

53, 54. *And as he said these tidings unto them, the scribe, and Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, and to provoke him to speak of many things: laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.*

Thus they proved the truth of the accusations that he had brought against them; but all their plots and traps were in vain until the hour appointed for his great sacrifice to be offered on Calvary.

Luke 12

The teaching of our Lord, in this chapter, has very much to do with Christianity in connection with this present life, and its cares and troubles. God has nowhere promised us exemption from affliction and trial. Indeed, it has been said, with much truth, that the Old Testament promise was one of prosperity, but that the New Testament promise is one of tribulation.

You may rest assured that, if it had been best for us to be taken away to heaven directly we were converted, the Lord would have done it, and that, as he has not done so, there are wise reasons why he keeps his people here for a while. The gold must go through the fire ere it has its place in the king's crown, and the wheat must be exposed to the winnowing fan ere it can be taken into the heavenly garner.

1. *In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*

Hypocrisy, however, of a kind that was calculated to spread, like leaven. If you know that a man is a hypocrite, you do not feel inclined to imitate him; but the Pharisees were such well-made hypocrites—such excellent counterfeits—that many people were tempted to imitate them. Our Lord teaches us, however, that it is no use being a hypocrite—

2. *For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.*

What, therefore, can be the use of hypocrisy? Hypocrisy leads a man to pretend

to be what he is not. His only hope lies in not being discovered; but, as Christ declares that “there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known;” hypocrisy becomes insanity as well as iniquity. Therefore, keep clear of it in every shape and form.

3. *Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.*

It would be well if we all lived in such a fashion that we should not be ashamed to have everything we did placarded on the very sky. I have heard of one who said that he would like to have a window in his heart, so that everybody might see what was going on. I think that, if I had such a window in my heart, I should like to have shutters to it; and I question whether any man really could wish to have his heart open to the gaze of all mankind. But, at least, let our lives be such that we should not be ashamed for the universal eye to be fixed upon them. If thou art ashamed to have any one of thine actions known, be ashamed to do it. If thou wouldst be ashamed to hear again what thou was about to say, do not say it. Check thy tongue; be cautious and careful. Live ever as one who realizes God’s omniscience. While one of the ancient orators was speaking, on one occasion, all his hearers went away with the exception of Plato; but he continued to speak as eloquently as ever, for he said that Plato was a sufficient audience for any man. So, if there be no one but the eye of God looking upon thee, be just as careful as if thou were in the street, surrounded by thy fellow-creatures; nay, be more careful because thou art in the presence of thy Creator.

4, 5. *And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*

There is nothing, comparatively, to fear in death considered by itself. If that were the end of man, he need have little or no fear even of God himself.

But inasmuch as after death, there is another state which is everlasting and unchangeable, there is grave cause for the ungodly to fear him who, “after he

hath killed hath power to cast into hell."

6, 7. *Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

God does not forget the sparrows, but he regards you with far greater interest and care, for he counts the very hairs of your head. He not only knows that there is such a person, but he knows the minutest details of your life and being. It is always a great comfort to remember that our Heavenly Father knows us. A dying man, who had been for many years a believer, had a minister at his bedside who said to him, "Don't you know Jesus?" "Yes, Sir," he replied, "I do, but the ground of my comfort is that he knows me." And, surely, there is a great force in that truth. Your Heavenly Father knows you so completely that he has counted the hairs of your head: "Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows."

8, 9. *Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.*

Mind what you are at, then, you who never confess Christ before men; because, according to the connection of this passage, you are set down as having denied him. Christ first speaks of those who confess him, and then of those who do not confess him, and he describes them as virtually denying him. On another occasion, Christ said, "he that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." Examine that attitude of yours, which you suppose to be neutral, and see how Christ regards it, and then ask yourself whether you can be satisfied to remain in it any longer.

10. *And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.*

What is the sin against the Holy Ghost? We do not know, and I think it is a great mercy that we do not know. I will tell you one reason why I think it is a great mercy, and that is, because the devil is continually tempting poor distracted souls to commit that sin. I have, within the past week, seen several persons who have been frequently tempted to commit it; only, happily, they did not know what the sin against the Holy Ghost was; and, therefore, they could not persuade themselves into the belief that they had committed it. I have seen many people who have told me that they have committed the unpardonable sin, and I have asked them to sit down, and tell me what that sin was; for if they could do so, I should find out something that I did not know. In every instance, I have very soon been able to say to them, "Though I do not know what the unpardonable sin is, I am quite certain that what you mention is not that sin, for such sin as yours has frequently been forgiven." It is a blessing that we are left in the dark concerning that matter; only as I have often said to you, do not presume upon your ignorance. This warning is something like the notice you see put up on certain great men's estates, "Man-traps and spring guns set here." If you go round the mansion, and say to the owner, "If you please, sir, will you tell me where the man-traps and spring guns are?" he will say, "No; why should you want to know where they are? You keep from trespassing, and then it will not matter to you where they are." That very indistinctness about the warning is a part of the preventive power which surrounds it.

You have no right to go trespassing there at all, so keep away from the place; and you are not told what the unpardonable sin is, though there is a sin which is unto death; and there is a blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, which shall not be forgiven.

11, 12. *And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.*

He has often done this. If you will read, in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, the answers given even by unlearned, illiterate men and women, who were taken quite at unawares, and assailed by subtle questions, you will see that they often answered in a remarkably wise way. They could not have answered better if the questions had been before them for months. They frequently burned their cunning

adversaries by their wisdom and sometimes by their wit, for the Holy Ghost taught them in the same hour what they ought to speak.

13. *And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.*

He rudely broke in upon Christ's discourse when he was preaching upon these important matters, because he wanted the Savior to act the part of a judge in his dispute with his brother.

14. *And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you.*

Some present-day minister, if this request had been made to him, would probably have said, "Well, I may save some litigation, perhaps, if I attend to this matter." As a general rule, brother, you had better mind your own business. Your Master, who was far wiser than you are, would not entangle himself with the affairs of this life; and, usually, true wisdom suggests that we also should keep ourselves apart from them.

15. *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

Jesus gave his hearers a good moral and spiritual lesson from the occurrence which they had witnessed, and then passed on to speak of the matter which always occupied his thoughts.

16, 17. *And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?*

This was his dialogue within himself. He might have answered at once, "As I

have more than I can use, I will give some away to the poor; why should I want to lay up my fruits, to let them get mouldy and corrupt? There are many poor people starving at my very gates; I will let them share in what God has so bountifully given to me." This might have been his answer to the question, "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" His reply, however, was a very different one.

18, 19. *And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou host much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.*

Notice how fond the rich man was of the little pronouns "I" and "my." He lived only for himself, and was an embodiment of that covetousness which our Lord abhorred and denounced. What a vivid contrast there is between what the man said to himself and the Lord's message to him!

20. *But God said unto him, Thou feel, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?*

"Thou fool." That is God's opinion of the man who means to build bigger barns in order that he may himself enjoy what is about to be taken away from him. He was a feel to be laying up in store for others to scatter. Many a miser's heirs have lived to ridicule him. He was the rake that gathered up a heap of gold, and they are the shovel and fork that scatter it. They drink the old man's health, and are much obliged to him for stinting himself that they may drink so deeply.

21. *So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

Here our Savior shows us the frail nature of the tenure upon which we hold all earthly goods, and how it is not worth while to make these the chief things of our life; for, while they may leave us, we are quite sure by-and—by, to have to leave them.

22, 23. *And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment.*

Do not spend your care on the lower things; care most for that which is most worth caring for—more for the body than for raiment, more for life than for meat, and consequently, more for the immortal spirit than for aught besides, and more for God even than for your own soul. Let your cares be rated according to their objects; to set a caring, anxious care upon the lesser things, will be folly indeed.

24. *Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?*

It seems, then, that those that are fed by God are much better fed than those that are fed by men. The ravens know no care whatever, for God cares for them; and, if we could ever bring our hearts into such a condition that we felt that everything to do with us was in God's hand, we should enter into a blessed, hallowed freedom from care in which we should find a sweet repose of spirit.

"Beneath the spreading heavens,
No creature but is fed;
And he who feeds the ravens,
Will give his children bread."

25, 26. *And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?*

It would be a very small matter to you if you were a foot taller, or if you were a foot shorter. It is not that the making of yourself a cubit taller or shorter would be a small thing to do, but it is a small thing in its result; it is an inconsiderable matter whether a man is tall or short. If ye, then, be not able even to reduce your stature, or to increase it, take no anxious thought about other things.

27. *Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

So that God cares not only for things that have necessities, as ravens have, but for things that have luxuries, as lilies have. When God does anything, he does it well. He is a grand Housekeeper; he does not measure out so many ounces of bread per diem, as if we were in a workhouse, but "they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." The lilies might do as well without their golden hues, they might ripen their seed without the lengthened stems that lift them where they can be observed; but God takes more care of them even than Solomon did of himself, for "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Now, dear children of God, if you trust your Heavenly Father, he will see that you have no cause for care. If you trust him with your souls, he will not give you a bare salvation, but a rich robe of righteousness to cover all your nakedness. When he does any work, he does it after a better fashion than the wisest of men could do it; and nature herself, working as she does for the lilies, is only God working in another way. But when God himself, without the intervention of the laws of nature, works in the kingdom of his grace, he does it perfectly; he does it gloriously.

28. *If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cost into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

Your life is not like that of the grass, or the flower of the field, that fades on a summer's day. God will take care of you, and the everlasting things shall have from him a care even greater than he gives to the temporal. Yet how much God really does for flowers—flowers that only open their cups in the morning, and shut them in death at night! How much of skill and wisdom there is even about them! Shall there not be greater skill and wisdom employed upon you who, when you have once begun to bloom in the light of God, shall go on blooming, and flowering, and shedding your perfume throughout the endless ages?

29. *And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither*

be ye of doubtful mind.

Full of carking care and wearing anxiety about little things; or, indeed, about anything.

30. *For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.*

Therefore he would have you so live—industriously, prudently, thriftily—that you shall get these things, and shall not waste them when you have them; but he would not have you live in an anxious, worrying, depressed spirit, as if you had no God, no Heavenly Father, no all-sufficient Friend; and as if there were no all-wise providence, and you were left to drift about uncared—for and alone. It is not so. O thou God of the lilies and God of the ravens, thou wilt be the God of thy people too!

31. *But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Thrown in as a kind of make-weight. You get the spiritual, and then the common blessings of life shall be added unto you.

32. *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Fathers good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

He may not give you much here; but, in due time, he will give you the kingdom. He may give to worldlings more of these secondary things—these husks, these mere illusions, these mirages of the desert—than he gives to you; but for you there is prepared a city that hath foundations, and a kingdom that shall never pass away. Therefore patiently wait until the appointed time; and fear not; “for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

33. *Sell that ye have, and give alms;*

Do not merely give away what you can spare; but even pinch yourself

sometimes, and sell what you can that you may have the more to give.

Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

Pat some of your estate where it cannot be lost. Take care that you invest some of it for God's poor, and God's work, where the interest will be sure, and the investment will be safe.

34. *For where your treasure is, there will your heart he also.*

Make sure of that. Your heart will go after your treasure; and if none of your treasure has gone to heaven, none of your heart will go there.

35, 36. *Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.*

Our Lord constantly reminded his disciples that the time would come when he must leave them for a season; but he always kept before them the thought of his return, and bade them watch for him as those that wait for their lord.

Whatever theory we hold about the future, may God grant that it may never prevent our looking for the coming of Christ as an event which may happen at any moment, and being on the watch for it as a matter the date of which we do not know! The practical essence of all Scriptural teaching upon that subject is just this, "Ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding."

37. *Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.*

This always seems to me to be one of the most remarkable of our Lord's

utterances while he was here upon the earth. His whole life was one of condescension, which was never more clearly manifested than it was when he, the Lord and Master of all, took the position of servant of all, and washed his disciples' feet; yet he here tells us that, if he finds us watching when he comes again, he will once more take his place as our servitor.

38, 39. *And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the good man of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.*

As he does not know when the thief will come, he is always watching.

40. *Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.*

This is a warning to Christ's own people; but it is still more a warning to those who do not know him. Suppose he were to come tonight; where would you be, you who have hitherto lived as if you were your own masters, and were by no means the servants of Christ? Take heed unto yourselves, for ye know not when your Lord shall come.

41. *Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all?*

And the Lord told him that, while it was spoken to all, it had a very special bearing upon apostolic men, upon preachers of the gospel, ministers of Christ.

42, 43. *And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*

Distributing the bread of life, giving milk to babes and meat to strong men; not behaving as if he were master, but acting only as a steward who serves out, not his own, but his master's stores. Oh, that we who are ministers of Christ may be always doing this! So shall we obtain the blessing promised to "that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

44. *Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.*

Just as Pharaoh made Joseph ruler over all Egypt, so, when men have done well in the ministry of Christ, he will promote them, and they shall do still more for him.

45. *But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken;*

First, he becomes lordly, he acts as if he were master, beats his fellow-servants, he is harsh and ungenerous, and assumes great dignity and gives himself airs. Let him mind what he is at, for his Master will come, and catch him usurping his place. The next danger is that he begins to enjoy himself, to be voluptuous, self-indulgent: "To eat and drink, and to be drunken." He becomes intoxicated with pride, he is carried away with divers errors; in making much of himself he loses his head, and acts like a fool.

46. *The Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.*

Truly, our Lord uses very strong words; the Savior is not one of your effeminate preachers like those of modern times, who seem as if the very word "hell" would burn their lips, and who will not warn men to flee from the wrath to come. It is an unkind and heartless want of humanity which prevents their being faithful to the souls of men. The great Lord, who is full of tenderness, does not hesitate to use the sternest figure, and the most terrible language, simply because he does

not consult his own feelings but aims at the highest good of those with whom he deals. This is a terrible word for us if we are unfaithful at the last: “He will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.” It is an awful thing that the unfaithful servant gets his portion with those who do not believe in Christ. The Lord preserve all of us from such a doom!

47. *And that servant, which knew his lords will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.*

So that there are different measures of responsibility; there are degrees in guilt, and degrees in punishment.

48. *But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall he beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

Judge ye, then, how much of ability and talent your Lord has entrusted to you, and he not content to have rendered him some service; but look for proportionate service, and humble yourselves in his presence if your service is not in proportion to the opportunities entrusted to you. Who among us can refrain from humbling himself before God when he thinks of this?

49, 50. *I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!*

His soul was speeding towards the cross, and his body seemed to be straitened, encaged, imprisoned, that it could not get to the end of this three years of labor. His soul was panting after suffering; groaning, crying out to be permitted to drink of the cup of our redemption even to the dregs. Now, this majesty of purpose, not merely to die, but to pant for death—not simply to climb the wall, to lead the forlorn hope and to long to do it, to be panting for the battle, desiring the fight, longing for the suffering—this is heroic ardor, self devotion entirely

unexampled!

51-53. *Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.*

Peace will be the ultimate issue of our Lord's coming; but, at the first, the Lord Jesus sends a sword among men. He wars against war, and contends against contention. In the act of producing the pence of heaven he arouses the rage of hell. Truth provokes opposition, purity excites enmity, and righteousness arouses all the forces of wrong.

During the process of fermentation, in which the right works for mastery, natural relationships go for nothing as preservatives of peace. The coming of Christ into a house is often the cause of variance between the converted and the unconverted. The more loving the Christian is, the more he may be opposed: love creates a tender zeal for the salvation of friends, and that very zeal frequently calls forth resentment. We are to expect this, and not to be put about by it when it occurs. Animosities on account of religion often excite the fiercest of enmities, and nearness of kin inflames rather than quenches the hostility. We are to press on in confessing the Lord Jesus, come what may of it. Even if our house becomes a den of lions to us, we must stand up for our Lord. The peace-at-any-price people have no portion in this kingdom.

54-56. *And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?*

They could prognosticate the weather by certain signs, and our Lord Jesus

mentions the weather-tokens of Palestine; yet they could not read the plainer and more plentiful warnings of the near future. Weather-signs are doubtful; but there were moral and spiritual tokens around them which could hardly be misunderstood if they would only consider them. Each country has its own sky warnings, and those of Palestine differ from those of England; but the signs of the times are the same in all lands. They were able to draw nice distinctions on the variable condition of "the face of the sky:" why could they not "discern the signs of the times?" They could have seen, if they had chosen to do so, that all the prophecies were one in declaring that the date of Messiah's appearing had arrived; and they could also have observed that every event was fulfilling those prophecies; but they were false at heart, and would not see, and yet cried out for a sign. Signs were all around them, and yet they repeated the parrot cry "Show us a sign." Most justly our Lord was indignant with them, and upbraided them, using the justly severe words, "O ye hypocrites!" Today the men who want more evidences of the supernatural deserve a similar denunciation.

Lord, do not allow any of us to be blind to the heavenly signs, — thy cross, thy resurrection, thy Word, thy Spirit, and thy work of grace, Teach us carefully to "discern" these things as being in very deed the abiding "signs of the times." Even in the growing coldness of the church, and the abounding iniquity of the world, let us see the tokens of thine Advent, and stand waiting and watching for thy long promised appearing.

57-59. *Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.*

In all disagreements be eager for peace. Leave off strife before you begin. In law-suits, seek speedy and peaceful settlements. Often, in our Lord's days, this was the most gainful way, and usually it is so now. Better lose your rights than get into the hands of those who will only fleece you in the name of justice, and hold you fast so long as a semblance of a demand can stand against you, or another penny can be extracted from you. In a country where "justice" meant robbery, it was wisdom to be robbed, and to make no complaint. Even in our

own country, a lean settlement is better than a fat law-suit. Many go into the court to get wool, but come out closely shorn. Carry on no angry suits in courts, but make peace with the utmost promptitude.

Luke 13

1. *There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*

This was a matter of common town talk, so of course they brought the news to Jesus. Notice how wisely he used this shameful incident. You and I too often hear the news of what is happening, but we learn nothing from it; our Savior's gracious mind turned everything to good account; he was like the bee that gathers honey from every flower.

2. *And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?*

"Do you imagine that there was some extraordinary guilt which brought this judgment upon them, and that those who were spared may be supposed to have been more innocent than they were?"

3. *I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.*

There would come upon them also, because of their sin, a sudden and overwhelming calamity. When we read of the most dreadful things happening to you we may conclude that something similar will happen to us if we are impenitent; if not in this world, yet in that which is to come.

4, 5. *Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise*

perish.

This was a foreshadowing of the overthrow of Jerusalem, and the razing of its walls and towers to the ground, which happened not long after; and even that overthrow of Jerusalem was but a rehearsal of the tremendous doom that shall come upon all who remain impenitent.

6. *He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.*

He had a right to seek fruit upon the tree, for it was planted where fruit-bearing trees were growing, and where it shared in the general culture that was bestowed upon all the trees in the vineyard.

7. *Then he said unto the dresser of the vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?*

“In the first year, it may have been a bad season; the second may have been the same; but for a tree to be fruitless for three years, to have so long a time of probation, and yet to bear no fruit, proves it to be worthless. If I had found even a little fruit on it, I would have been hopeful that more would come by-and-by; but’ these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none.’ Surely, there never will be any. It has had every opportunity; there is no need of any longer delay: ‘cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?’”

8, 9. *And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

The vine-dresser has much patience; but there is a limit to it. He will not willingly lose a tree; but only one more year is to be given to this cumberer of the vineyard. Who can tell but that, in the case of some who are here, that final year is coming to a close? Oh, that the Lord would cause the fruitless to become fruitful ere the year ends Next, in the chapter, we have a word of comfort to

those who have been under the dominion of sin for many a day, and who are almost in despair.

10, 11. *And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.*

If she was there when Christ was speaking about the fruitless fig tree I feel pretty certain that she said "That must mean me; I am the fruitless fig tree," but the Master did not mean her, he had other words and more cheering tidings for her.

12. *And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.*

Observe the word "Behold" here. Sometimes, in old books, they used to put a hand in the margin to call attention to something special in the text, so, this word seems as though nobody in the synagogue was worthy of such special notice as the most forlorn and desolate individual there: "a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and who bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself." It was to be a happy sabbath for her, though she did not know it. She used to go to the synagogue, though it must have been painful for her to be present; possibly, she could not even see the minister, she was so "bowed together." It must have been a great surprise to her when the Savior called her to him, and said to her, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity."

13. *And he laid his hands on her: and immediately he was made straight, and glorified God.*

I should think she did. We have no record of what she said; she may have merely cried out, "Hallelujah"; but the very look of her, her streaming eyes filled with gratitude, her face beaming with delight, all tended to glorify God. Even if she had said nothing, her being made straight would of itself have glorified God; and, just as that once crooked woman could glorify God, so can a guilty sinner, crushed and helpless, glorify God. It was when Christ's hands were laid upon her

that she was made straight. Oh, that he would lay his hands on some of you! May this be to you the saving Sabbath of the year, that God may be glorified in you.

14. *And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people,*

In what a cold-blooded, heartless manner he must have said it, you may well imagine. For a man not to rejoice when he saw his poor fellow-creature thus healed, shows that he must have been destitute of much milk of human kindness, and that bigotry had dried up his soul.

There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

He did not dare to speak to Christ. I suppose the majesty of Christ's manner overawed him, so he struck at the people directly, and at Christ through them. Now our Lord did not go sideways to work when he replied to him.

15–17. *The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.*

The Jews had reduced the Sabbath to a day of idleness and luxury. The only thing they forbade themselves was the doing of anything. Now the Sabbath was never intended to be spent in idleness and luxury. It should be spent in the worship of God; and works of mercy and works of piety make the Sabbath Day holy, instead of being contrary to its demands. And our Savior, by giving rest to that poor burdened woman, was in truth, making Sabbath in her body and in her

soul.

18. *Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it?*

For men learn much by resemblances, and the things which are seen are frequently helpful to us in seeking to set forth the things which are not seen. Knowing that God is one in all that he has done, we are often able to learn from one part of his works to understand another. What, then, is God's kingdom like? Is it like a mighty army marching with banners and trumpets? No. Is it like the raging sea, rolling onwards and sweeping everything before it? Not so; at all events, it is not so visibly.

19. *It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree: and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.*

A little grace grows and becomes great grace. If thou hast at present but little faith, be thankful for that little. Bring it to Christ; let it feed upon him; and thy mustard seed will grow till it becomes a tree. The same is true of the gospel throughout the world. We need never be afraid because we happen to be few in number. If we have got the truth, the truth will live; and if the truth be small as the mustard seed, there is life in it—vitality in it, and it is sure to grow ere long. We must not be afraid to be in the minority. Majorities are not always right. Are they ever? Perhaps sometimes.

20, 21. *And again he said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*

Some read this as a parable to set forth the power of evil, and I do not doubt that it does set it forth. At the same time it sets forth the power of good, too, for it is put side by side with the other as the likeness of the kingdom of God. And truth in the soul does work, and ferment, and permeate the entire nature, if it be placed there.

22-24. *And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?*

That is a question that I have heard a great many times. What is the fascination that makes men so fond of asking it? I do think that some ask it as if they almost hoped that there would be few. If they do not go to our Ebenezer or Rehoboth, what can become of them? Surely you cannot expect that there should be any good come to those that do not frequent Salem and Enod. What must they hope? In that spirit the question is often asked; but, brethren, may God lift us up above that spirit, and make us desire that there should be multitudes saved. I suppose that one of the surprises of heaven will be to see vastly many more there than we ever dreamt would reach that place. Jesus Christ gave a very practical answer. It was no answer, and yet was the best of answers.

And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, wilt seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

Make a push for it; agonize for it; for many will seek—not strive, but merely seek. Or, to put another meaning into it, strive now to enter in at the strait gate, for many will be unable, when it is too late; and that, doubtless, is the sense of the passage.

25. *When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door*

They do not like to go away, they are reluctant to meet their final doom. Oh, that they had been wise enough to cry for mercy when it was to be had! Now they stand, and begin to knock; and more than that, they begin to plead.

25. *Saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us;*

All this earnestness, all this deference, all this reverence have come too late.

25, 26. *And he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence*

ye are: then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.

See; there are some men who will not think of going to heaven till it is too late; and then, when they get to heaven's gate, and find it shut, they will begin to plead for admittance though they pleaded not for it before When they might have had the blessing, they would not have it; and when they cannot have it, then they grow earnest in crying for it.

27, 28. *But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.*

Driven away, yet they could see the saintly ones there, and see their own kith and kin there, for they were Jews, and they could see. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets" there, but they themselves were cast out; and what was worse for them:

29. *And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.*

Rank outsiders, far off heathen, outrageous sinners, harlots; "they shall come," and repent, and "sit down in the kingdom of God," and this shall cut to the quick those who were hearers of the Word, but who perished because they were workers of iniquity.

30. *And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.*

Many who, today, seem to be unlikely to be converted, those who are "last" in character, will yet be "first" in repentance; and there who are "first" in privileges, and even in hopefulness, who will be "last" in the great day of account. May we take home to our hearts this solemn warning!

31. *The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee.*

Think of the Pharisees being concerned about Christ's life! What an affectation of regard! Yet it was only affectation. We must always be on our guard against the foes of God even when they speak most fairly; indeed, it is their agreeable, affectionate words that we have most cause to dread.

32. *And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox,*

Jesus called Herod a fox because he wanted to get Christ out of his territory without having the opprobrium of driving him away. So he sent this roundabout message to try to make a coward of the Lord, and to get him to go off on his own account.

Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.

That is, "I shall stay my full time here, while I have work to do, I shall do it, and I am not going away until it is finished. I am not afraid of Herod threatening to kill me, for I am immortal till my work is done." He is not even flurried, or put about by such a message as that. Besides when men mean to bite, they do not usually bark; and if Herod had meant to kill Christ just then, he would not have told him what he was going to do.

33. *Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.*

What a sad thing for Christ to have to say! So many holy men had been murdered in Jerusalem that he roughly put it as being true, in the main, that all the prophets were martyred there, the exceptions only proving the rule.

34. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killed the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy*

children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!

There was their weakness, they were like a brood of chickens; there was his power to protect them, like a hen gathers her brood under her wings; yet there was their infatuation, that they would rather perish than come and be sheltered beneath his almighty wings: “and ye would not.”

35. *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you,*

Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

There will be no true glory for Jerusalem until the Jews are converted; there will be no return of Christ to that royal city until they shall welcome him with louder hosannas than they gave when he rode in triumph through the streets, and entered into the temple. The Lord grant that we may never reject Christ! Let us run, even now, like little chicks, and hide beneath the wings of the Eternal.

Luke 14

1-6. *And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; and answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things.*

He propounds a case, and makes them to be judges in it. If a man with “an ass or an ox”, saw it fall “into a pit”, or become cast on its back “on the sabbath”, would he not “straightaway pull him out”, and set it on its feet? Of course he would; and he would be right in so doing. How much then is a man better than a beast? therefore it is and must be right to succor a man. Alas, some act as if a man were not better than an animal; for their dogs and horses are better housed than their laborers, and they are more indignant about the killing of a fox than at the starving of a pauper.

Our Lord’s argument was overwhelming. One form of human kindness being proved to be right, the whole class of beneficent actions is admitted, and “it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.” One wonders that anybody ever thought otherwise. But zeal for externals, and hatred of spiritual religion, when united, create a narrow bigotry as cruel as it is ridiculous. Our Lord has set us free from the Rabbinical yoke, and we find rest unto our souls in a true spiritual Sabbath. Let none, however, from this liberty, infer a license, and treat the Lord’s-day as if it were their own, and might be spent for their own purposes. They best keep the Sabbath who on the seventh day, and always, rest from their own works, as God did from his; but how can a man rest until he knows the finished work of God in

Christ Jesus?

7-9. *And he put forth a parable to those which wore bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms;*

This parable was by far the best part of the entertainment of the day—

saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be hidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room.

For, of course, the next room is full, and the next, and the only vacant seat, when the feast has begun, will probably be in the very lowest room or the house.

10. *But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room, that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.*

Note that our Savior was not just then talking to his disciples, or else he would have given more spiritual reasons for his advice; but, speaking to the people who were gathered as guests at the Pharisee's house, he appealed to them with an argument suitable to themselves. We may, however, extract the marrow from this bone. Let us not covet the highest place; let us not desire honor among men. In the Church of God the way upward is downward. He that will do the lowest work shall have the highest honor.

Our Master washed his disciples' feet, and we are never more honored than when we are permitted to imitate his example.

11. *For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

There is a conspiracy of heaven and earth and hell to put down proud men, neither good nor bad, the highest nor the lowest, can endure those who are self-exalted; but if you are willing to take your right place, which is probably the lowest, you shall soon find honor in the midst of your brethren.

12. *Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbor; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee.*

Our Savior, you see, keeps to one line of instruction. It was a feast, so he used the feast to teach another lesson. It is always well, when men's minds are running in a certain direction, to make use of that particular current.

When a feast is uppermost in the minds of men, it is no use starting another subject. So the Savior rides upon the back of the banquet, making it to be his steed. Note his advice to his host: "Try to avoid doing that for which you will be recompensed. If you are rewarded for it the transaction is over; but if not, then it stands recorded in the book of God, and it will be recompensed to you in the great day of account."

13, 14. *But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.*

It should be your ambition to have something set down to your credit "at the resurrection of the just." If you do someone a kindness with a view to gaining gratitude, you will probably be disappointed; and even if you should succeed, what is the gratitude worth? You have burned your firework, you have seen the brief blaze, and there is an end of it. But if you get no present return for your holy charity, so much the better for you.

15-17. *And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the*

kingdom of God. Then said he unto him,

As if to prove what a privilege it is to be permitted to “eat bread” there, and that the persons who appear most likely to do so will never taste of it and that the most unlikely persons will be brought into it, Jesus “said unto him,”—

a certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.

They had accepted the invitation, so they were pledged to be present but, in the meantime, they had changed their minds with regard to their intended host, and they were unwilling to grace his feast.

18. *And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.*

Yet it was supper time, and people do not generally go to see pieces of ground at night; and if the man had bought the land he ought to have seen it before he bought it. People do not generally buy land without looking at it. A bad excuse is worse than none; and this is one of those excuses which will not hold water for a minute.

19. *And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.*

He pretended that he had bought five yoke of oxen without proving them, and that he wanted to prove them after he had bought them, when, of course, he could not cancel the bargain: a likely story! But, when men want to make an excuse, and they have no truth to raw as the raw material, they can always make one out of a lie.

20. *And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot*

come.

This man did not ask to be excused; he had married a wife, so that settled the matter, of course he could not go to the feast.

21. *So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things.*

Every true servant of Christ should go to his Lord, and tell him what reception his Master's message has had. After service, we sometimes have an enquirers' meeting; but after every sermon there ought to be a meeting of the servant with his Lord to tell the result of the errand on which he has been sent. Sometimes, as in this case, it will be a very painful meeting, as the servant tells how his Master's message has been despised, and his invitation rejected.

21. *When the master of the house being angry*

Notice what the Lord does even when he is angry, he just invents some new way of showing mercy to men: "The master of the house being angry"—

said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

Happy anger that explodes in blessing! The justly angry master turns away from the bidden ones who had insulted him, and sends for those who had not hitherto been bidden, that they might come to the feast.

22. *And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.*

They fetched in all the poor people, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind whom they could find, it was a great gathering, and a strange gathering, yet there was still room for more guests at the banquet.

23. *And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*

“Bring in highway-men and hedge-birds, those that have no place whereon to lay their heads; fetch them in by force if necessary, ‘that my house may be filled.’”

24. *For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*

They were invited, yet they would not come; but others shall come, and fill the tables, and the great feast shall be furnished with guests. No provisions of mercy will ever be wasted. If you who are the sons and daughters of godly parents, or you who are the regular hearers of the Word, will not have Christ, then others shall. If you hear, but hear in vain, then the rank outsiders shall be brought in, and they shall feed upon the blessed provisions of the infinite mercy of God, and God shall be glorified; but terrible will be your doom when the great Giver of the gospel feast says concerning you and those like you, “None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

25, 26. *And there went great multitudes with him:*

During at least a part of his earthly ministry, Christ was very popular. The people crowded to his feet, and they were willing to make him a king; but you must have observed that he was always faithful in speaking to the populace, he did not flatter them. He dealt in the same fashion also with those who professed to be his followers. He winnowed the heap that was laid upon the floor, and drove away the chaff from the midst of the wheat.

and he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Do not misunderstand this passage. Our Lord does not use the word “hate” in our common acceptation of the term, for no man would hate his own life; but he means that the love of all these must be secondary to the love we bear to him.

Compared with our love to our Lord, all lower love must be more like hate. We must be willing to give up everything—to give up even ourselves—our entire selves—to him, for Christ will have all or nothing. He will never divide the human heart with any rival. If we profess to serve him, we must have him for our only Master, and not attempt to serve two masters. I fear that this truth greatly needs to be enforced nowadays, for we have numbers of so-called Christians, who are worldlings first, and then Christians afterwards. We have a great many professors who might be accurately described by the words of a little girl concerning her father. When someone asked her, "Is your father a Christian?" she replied, "Yes, but he has not worked much at it lately." There are plenty of that sort. Christianity is their trade, their business, their profession; but they have not worked much at it lately, they carry it on very slightly indeed. Let it not be so with us; if we would be followers of Christ, our whole hearts must be his.

27. *And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.*

If there is any cross-bearing involved in Christianity—such as the cross of holy living, or the cross of believing old-fashioned doctrines, and not being "abreast of the times,"—if there is any sort of cross which is involved in the conscientious discharge of our duty as followers of Christ, we must bear it, or else we cannot be his disciples. Our Lord's words are very clear and explicit: "'And whosoever doth not bear his cross,'—be he who he may, whatever pretensions or professions he may make—if he does not bear his cross, 'and come after me, cannot be my disciple.'"

28–30. *For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.*

Do you not think that there are a great many towers of that kind about in our day? I mean, unfinished Christian characters, persons who profess to be followers of Christ, but are not. They just exhibit to you their own shortcomings; they are people with good intentions, who did make some attempt to follow

Jesus; but, since it involved too much self-denial, they were not able to go that length, so they turned back, and walked no more with him. They began to build a tower, but never finished it. May God, in his mercy, prevent you and me becoming a laughing-stock to all eternity! I believe that, in the last great day, and forever, those persons, who knew enough about the gospel to wish to be Christians, and who were somewhat actuated by right motives, but yet who never went so far as to give up their hearts to Christ, will stand forth as monuments of their own folly and even the demons in hell will point at them, and say, "These men began to build, and were not able to finish." Such persons will be unable to answer that contemptuous sneer. If you have conscience enough to begin to follow Christ, even reason itself requires you to go the whole length. If you know that it is right for you to do so, why do you not go through with it? If you are sufficiently convinced of its rightness to go as far as you do, why not go still farther? God grant that you may! Better never begin to build than to commence without having counted the cost, and then to find that you have not sufficient to finish.

31, 32. *Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.*

If you cannot fight the world, the flesh, and the devil—if there is no power that can help you to do it, or if you are not willing to be helped by the only power that can help you—if you will not surrender yourself to Christ that he may baffle all the hosts of the adversary, then it is of no use for you to begin the war.

33. *So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.*

In Christ's days, and afterwards, discipleship usually involved the absolute giving up of everything that his followers had, for those were times of persecution; and if such seasons should come to us, we must have such love to Christ that, for his sake, we could forsake all that we have; otherwise we cannot be his disciples.

34. *Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned?*

Christianity is good; but if the very life has gone out of it, what can you do with it? A dead professor is the most corrupt thing under heaven. Some there are who think that God's salt can lose its savor, and yet get it back again. I remember one who told me that he knew a person who had been born again four times. That doctrine of re-re-re-regeneration is one that I have never found in the Word of God. I believe that true regeneration never fails to take effect, and that it never loses that effect. It begets within the soul a life that cannot die; but, if that life could die, it could never be brought back again. The apostle Paul puts this matter beyond dispute in Hebrews 6:4–6: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

35. *It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out.*

A dead profession of religion is utterly useless; and if it could be possible that a man should be really quickened by the Spirit of God, and yet that the new life should depart from him, he would be in a hopeless case indeed.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

This matter is worthy of earnest heed. If you can hear anything, hear this truth. This call to attention needs to be oft repeated. Through the hearing ear, the divine blessing comes to the soul; therefore hear, and your soul shall live. Our Lord and King, who made the ear, has a right to demand its attention to his voice. Some men have no ears to hear truth, but quick ears for falsehood. We should be grateful if the Lord has given us spiritual perception; for "the hearing ear and the seeing eye" are from the Lord.

Luke 15

This is a chapter that needs no explanation; it carries its key within itself, and the experience of every child of God is the best exposition of it. The three parables recorded here set forth the work of saving grace in different aspects.

1. *Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.*

They were drawing near. It was not an unusual occurrence. It was their habit to draw near to Christ. The Pharisees and Scribes stood in the outer ring. They did not come too near. These poor outcasts and offcasts, publicans and sinners, drew near. They wanted to catch every word. They could not have too much of it. They took a delight in getting near to his blessed person. They drew near to hear him.

2. *And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*

The sinful, known to be so. This man receives them, welcomes them, admits them to an intimacy with him. What is worse, he eats with them. To teach them is bad enough, but to sit at the same table with them, making himself their company, and making them his company, this is worse and worse. And so they murmured. I am very glad that they did. We owe a great deal to the murmurings of the proud Pharisee; for our Lord graciously answered those murmurings and then he gave us some of the choicest jewels of speech that are preserved in the treasury of knowledge.

3. *And he spake this parable unto them, saying,*

They were hardly worth his trouble. But though he spoke it to them others who are not of that sort have sucked sweetness out of it ever since. This is a parable we are told, but on looking at it we find it to be three. Have you never seen a picture in three panels and the whole of the panels necessary to complete the picture? So it is here. Different views of the great work of grace suiting different persons, so that if we do not see through one glass, we may use a second, and a third.

4. *What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?*

He is justifying his looking for the lost ones. Their accusation was, that he received the sinful and false, and ate with them. “Well, well,” says Christ. “I do that. But I am a shepherd, and if I have lost one of my sheep, do you blame me if I leave the flock to go after the lost sheep?” “And he goeth after that which is lost until he find it.”

5, 6. *And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.*

A true picture of Christ going after those who are willful and wayward, and therefore have taken to wandering till they are lost; lost to God, lost to society, lost to usefulness, lost to happiness, perhaps lost to hope. He goes after them. That is, in his life. He throws them on his shoulders in his death.

He will bring them home rejoicing by his resurrection life; and then throughout eternity he will make the glorified spirits in heaven glad by showing them the sheep that was lost, the soul that was saved.

7. *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

If such there be—and there are many who think that they belong to this class—they bring no joy to the great Shepherd; but you who have had to mourn over your lost estate set the bells of heaven ringing with a new melody when you are recovered by the great Redeemer.

The first of these three parables may he said to represent salvation in reference to the work of the Son of God as the great Seeker and Saver of the souls of men. In the second, we have a representation of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church of God.

8. *Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?*

Her thoughts were all concerning that one lost piece. It had not more intrinsic value than the rest, but being lost it called off her attention from the other nine. She valued it, and for the hope of finding it she lighted a candle, swept the house, and sought diligently till she found it. This is a picture of the Holy Spirit's work in seeking for lost souls. They bear the King's impress, they are coins of the realm. This woman knew that the silver coin was not far away, so she swept the house, and sought diligently, using all her eyes, devoting all her time to this one object, quitting all other avocations until she found it.

9. *And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.*

She might never have called them together to rejoice that she had ten pieces of silver, she might even have hidden them away; and the joy she had in them might have been only her own, a solitary joy; but now that one piece had been lost, and had been found again, she says, "Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost."

10. *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

Not joy among the angels, as some read it, though no doubt that is a truth; but "joy in the presence of the angels of God;" and what can that mean but that God himself rejoices, and rejoices so that angels perceive it; and no doubt they then join in the delight? But all this points out that it is the lost one that is the great object of consideration, that out of any congregation where the gospel is preached, it is the lost one who is the most important person in the whole place.

In the next verses, we get the Father's part in the work of the recovery of the wanderer.

11, 12. *And he said,*

And here comes the greatest of all the parables, the most instructive perhaps, and the best loved of them all. In these parables we do not find anything about a Savior, a Mediator. Did you ever read a parable that contained all the truth? If any man were to try and make a parable that contained all truth at once, verily I say unto you he would be a fool. He must fail, and fail in his object of teaching anything.

"One thing at a time, and that done well,
Is a very good rule as many can tell."

And to teach one truth at a time is quite sufficient. It is true that the parable that we are going to read says nothing about a mediator, but it does not say anything about the father seeking his lost son, not a word. No work of the Holy Spirit. It is meant to teach one thing, and it does teach it, and if it does not teach fifty things, do not imagine that the other forty-nine are not true.

A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

In the East the younger son has a smaller portion of the estate, compared with the elder. But it is a usual thing—certainly not an unusual thing—to let him have his portion while his father is yet alive, that he may make use of it, and be able, by his industry, to increase it till he becomes a substantial person—a custom not altogether without wisdom in it, if there must be a distinction between elder and

younger sons. You remember how Abraham gave his sons, by Keturah, portions, and sent them away, whereas Isaac had nothing, because he was the heir and had every thing. So this younger son asks for his portion, and the father divided to them his living.

13. *And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.*

It is clear that his heart had gone away from his father before he went away himself. He would not have wished to take from his father his portion of goods, or to be independent of his father, if he had not felt a spirit of alienation; and, therefore, what his father did developed the latent evil; just as, oftentimes, the loving mercy of God brings to the surface the concealed sin which is in man all the while; and then he sins the more openly. It is a grievous thing that even divine love should lead us to sin—not of itself, but because of our evil nature, just as the sun shines, not that he may make the weeds to grow, or that he may help to lift into the air noxious effluvia.

14. *And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land;*

There generally does arise" a mighty famine" in such cases. Famines and other miseries are God's messengers, which he sends after his wandering children.

and he began to be in want.

This was a new sensation to him; he had never known it when he was at home. He did not know it in his first boisterous days away from his father's house, but now "he began to be in want."

15. *And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.*

Perhaps he did not want to employ him, but said that he would give him that

occupation if he cared to accept it. It was small pay, very dishonoring work to a Jew, not fit employment for the son of a nobleman; yet “half a loaf is better than no bread,” so he took it, though even the half loaf must have been a very small one.

16. *And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat:*

It does not say that he would have stopped his hunger with the husks, for that could not be done. He would only fill his belly—fill it up, as it were, with anything, just to choke his sense of want. And there are many men that know that the world could not satisfy them, but it could at least take off their thoughts a little from their inward want, and so they fain would fill up their belly with the husks that the swine do eat.

and no man gave unto him.

He gave to them: he spent all his money with them. He was a fine fellow then, so they said. But now no man gave to him. And what a mercy it was, for if they had given him all he wanted he would not have gone back to his father. There is nothing like a little gracious starvation to fetch a man home to Christ. And it is a blessed providence, and a blessed work of the Spirit of God when a man at last is starved till he must go home to God.

17. *And when he came to himself,*

He had been out of his mind all the while. He had been beside himself with sin. “When he came to himself.”

he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

“Still his child, though. Still he is my father, and I know that there is bread enough for me. Why do I not get it? How sad that I should starve when in my father’s house there is so much.” What a motive that is tot a poor hungry soul to

go to God, namely, that God has so much—so much that he feeds his servants till they cannot eat it all. They have bread enough, and to spare. Why should his child then, though a wanderer, die of hunger in a foreign land?

18, 19. *I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.*

You notice that this last part of the prayer he never did pray; for it was stopped by his father's love. There was a legalism about it naturally suggested by his own despair, but it was not such as his father would tolerate.

20. *And he arose, and came to his father.*

It was a mercy for him it did not end in resolution. He came to matter of fact.

But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

Then did he come to his father, or did his father come to him? Well, methinks it was both, but still, chiefly that the father came to him. "When he was yet a great way off"—he had not gone half the distance—his father ran the bigger half of the way. He saw him. He had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21. *And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

He was going on to say, I dare say, "Make me one of thy hired servants," but his father kissed him on the mouth, and he never prayed that prayer. It was not a gospel prayer, and would not do, and so he stifled it with love. It was good as far as he did go.

22. *But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and*

put it on him: and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

Is this the justifying righteousness of Christ? I think not. No servant can put that on. God himself imputes the righteousness of Christ to us. It means just this: Receive this poor forgiven sinner into the church, and treat him like a gentleman. Do not look at him as one that is wearing rags any longer. Put the best robe on him, treat him well, take him into your favor, receive him into your society, put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

23. *And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:*

"Do all that you can to make this poor broken heart happy again, to lift this poor fallen son into the sphere from which he has been so long away. Make him feel at home; 'and let us eat, and be merry.'"

24. *For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.*

I have no information that they ever left off being merry. The Church of God never ceases to praise and bless the Lord for saved sinners. If you come to Christ, clear friend, you will set bells a-ringing that will never leave off throughout eternity: "They began to be merry?

25. *Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.*

This was the better one of the two. I have heard him often greatly blamed, and so he deserves to be; but, for all that, he was a true son. He was not at home. He was out at work. There are some Christians that are all for work, and never seem to have any fellowship and communion. They are always active, but they are not always contemplative. He was in the field.

26. *And he called one of the servants, and asked him what these things meant.*

He was a gloomy spirit, good, solid, regular, constant, but not very joyful. He took things rather severely, so he did not understand what this amusement could mean. “Some of the Salvation Army got in here,” he said, “some of those boisterous Methodist people got her, and I do not like it. I am more regular than that. I do not like these rows and uproars. He asked of the servant what these things meant.

27. *And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.*

Did you ever notice that point—the father’s gladness because he had received him safe and sound: no bones broken: his face was not disfigured? He was safe and sound. It is a wonderful thing that the sinner should come back to Christ safe and sound, considering where he has been. He has been in much worse danger than if he had been in battle or in shipwreck. He has been with drunkards and with harlots, and yet he is received safe and sound. Oh! the wonders that grace can do. To put safeness and soundness into us who went so far astray.

27. *And he was angry,*

He did not want the fatted calf killed, if this reprobate brother were allowed to come in at the back door, and to eat with the servants, he thought that quite good enough, but for this rebel to be put upon an equality with himself—he could not bear that!

and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

See the tenderness of this father; the same arms which embraced the sinning one were also ready to clasp the self-righteous one. I always feel great pity and great admiration for this dear, dear father. What with a bad son and a good son he had two bad sons, for this good son, you see, had got in a pet just as I have seen some real Christians get into a very un-Christian frame of mind. Well, they do not like somehow receiving into their company the women that have gone astray —the men that have lost their reputation. He was angry, and would not go in, and now his father crowned his love. He ran to meet one son and now he comes out to reason with another who is unnaturally and ungraciously angry with his

father.

28. *And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.*

I hardly know which to admire most, the love of the father when he fell upon the neck of the prodigal, or the love of the father when he went out to talk with his elder son: “Therefore came his father out, and intreated him.”

Oh, our God is very good to us when we give way to naughty tempers! If we begin to think that we are very holy people, that we have been long the servants of God, and that there ought to he some little fuss made over us as well as over great sinners that come into the church, then our Father is very gentle, and he comes out and entreats us.

29. *And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gayest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:*

“I have had no banquets. I have kept at home, a patient worker, and have had no extraordinary joys.” I know some Christian workers who are very much in this condition. They keep on and on and on in holy service, and they do well; but they seldom have great entertainment’s of high joy and unspeakable delight. It is their own fault, and it is a thousand pities that they do not have them, for they might have them if they would. There is a tendency to grow so absorbed in service, like Martha, that we are cumbered by it; and we do not have the joy of Mary in communion at the Master’s feet. I am sure that this elder son was out of fellowship with his father, or else he would not have talked as he did. We are all apt to get into such a condition. See to it, ye who work for Jesus, that it is not so with you.

Then the elder brother went on to say,—

30. *But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.*

I do not read that the prodigal had devoured his father's living with harlots; that is the elder brother's version of it. I dare say that it was true, but it is always a pity to give the roughest interpretation to things. He had spent his substance "in riotous living." When we are cross, we generally use the ugliest words we can; we may think that we are speaking forcibly, but indeed we are speaking naughtily, and not as our Father would have us speak.

31. *And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.*

Oh, what a word was that! How it reminds Christians of their privileges, if they would but appropriate them! It is yours, beloved, to live always with your God, and to know that all that he has is yours. You ought to live in a perpetual festival; for you there should be one joyful Christmastide that lasts from the beginning of the year to the end of it: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

32. *It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*

It was the fit thing, and the proper thing, and the right thing, that there should be extraordinary joy over a returning sinner. There ought to he, there must be, there shall be, special music and dancing over sinners saved by the grace of God.

Luke 16

1, 2. *And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.*

"Give an account of thy stewardship," is a command that may be addressed to the ungodly. They are accountable to God for all that they have, or ever have had, or ever shall have. The law of the Lord is not relaxed because they have sinned; they still remain responsible to God, even though they attempt to cast off the yoke of the Almighty. As creatures formed by the divine hand, and sustained by divine power, they are bound to serve God; and if they do not, and will not, his claims upon them do not cease, and to each of them he saith, "Give an account of thy stewardship."

3. *Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.*

A Christian man would do well to remember that it is never to his honor, though it is not always to his dishonor, to beg. "I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed," said the unfaithful steward, and if he had been a faithful one he would have been more ashamed still. I say again, when it comes to the pinch, and a man must ask of his fellow, let him do it boldly; but let him never be too ready to do it, but, like the apostle, as long as he can do without it, let him say, "I have labored with my own hand, and eaten no man's bread for nought."

4-8. *I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the*

stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

It is right to learn, even from the lips of the wicked, for they are seldom so foolish in worldly things as they are in spirituals. Professing Christians might learn much from the children of darkness if they would take the trouble to do so, for are they not in their generation wiser than the children of light?

9. *And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*

Let the Christian labor so to live that he shall not lack a friend. "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," is one of Christ's own precepts. If to stoop, to cringe, to lie, win you friends, scorn to do it; but if with uprightness before God, you can still mingle such affection and such generosity towards men, that you shall win their suffrages, do it I pray you. The time may come when their sympathy shall befriend you.

10. *He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*

He who is faithful to his Lord shall have greater opportunities of proving his loyalty and devotion in a higher sphere.

11-13. *If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye*

have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

"No man can serve two masters." They cannot both be masters. He can serve two, but they cannot both be his master. A man can serve two who are not his masters, or twenty either, he may live for twenty different purposes, but he cannot live for more than one master purpose—there can only be one master purpose in his soul.

Do you think, sinners, you will be able to serve two masters, when Christ has said you cannot? Do you fancy you can walk with God and walk with mammon too? Will you take God on one arm and the devil on the other? Do you suppose you can be allowed to drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of Satan at the same time? I tell you, ye shall depart, as cursed and miserable hypocrites, if so you come to God. God will have the whole of you come, or else you shall not come at all. The whole man must seek after the Lord, the whole soul must be poured out before him, otherwise it is no acceptable coming to God at all. Oh, halters between two opinions, remember this and tremble.

14, 15. *And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.*

What is man's opinion after all? The balances are not those of the sanctuary, and the weights are not those of justice. The verdict of earth will be reversed by the judgment of heaven, for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

16. *The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.*

John had aroused an unusual earnestness which had not died out. Men were eager for the glories of “the kingdom of God.” Though they misinterpreted it, they were on fire to seize it. A holy violence had been introduced by John, and our Lord would have all those who would obtain the kingdom capture it by the same passionate eagerness. The time was come to end indifference, and put on a holy resolution as to the things of God.

17. *And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.*

Not a syllable is to become effete. Even to the smallest letters, the dot of every “i”, and the crossing of every “t”, the law will outlast the creation. The Old Testament is as sacredly guarded as the New. “The Word of the Lord endureth for ever.” Modern critics have set themselves an impossible task in their endeavor to get rid of the inspiration of the whole sacred volume, or of this book, or that chapter, or that verse; for the whole shall come forth of their furnace as silver purified seven times.

18. *Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.*

Our Lord forbids divorce except for the one crime of infidelity to the marriage-vow. She who commits adultery does by that act and deed in effect sunder the marriage-bond, and it ought then to be formally recognized by the State as being sundered; but for nothing else should a man be divorced from his wife. Marriage is for life, and cannot be loosed, except by the one great crime which severs its bond, whichever of the two is guilty of it. Our Lord would never have tolerated the wicked laws of certain of the American States, which allow married men and women to separate on the merest pretext. A woman divorced for any cause but adultery, and marrying again, is committing adultery before God, whatever the laws of man may call it. This is very plain and positive; and thus a sanctity is given to marriage which human legislation ought not to violate. Let us not be among those who take up novel ideas of wedlock, and seek to deform the marriage laws under the presence of reforming them. Our Lord knows better than our modern social reformers. We had better let the laws of God alone, for we shall never discover any better.

19-23. *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

The rich man died, and was buried, with many waving plumes over his mourning coach. His will was read, his property was squabbled over, and there was an end of him; everybody soon forgot him. But the angels carried Lazarus into Abraham's bosom. They had not forgotten Lazarus. The dogs had licked his sores, but the angels had loved him. The dunghill was his couch, but Abraham's bosom was his throne. If you are a believer in Jesus, you are not forgotten up in glory.

"The rich man seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." Who was that? That was a Jew of the kind I have described, who had everything in this life, being clothed in purple, and faring sumptuously every day, but he had no heart to perceive nor eyes to see. "In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments."

24. *And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.*

It was not a metaphorical tongue, and it was not a metaphorical flame. It was not metaphorical water that he wanted. Real, positive, actual flame tormented the body of that rich Dives in hell.

Now recollect, if Jesus had not thirsted, every one of us would have thirsted for ever afar off from God, with an impassable gulf between us and heaven. Our sinful tongues, blistered by the fever of passion, must have burned for ever had not his tongue been tormented with thirst in our stead.

25, 26. *But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.*

Glorified saints cannot visit the prisonhouse of lost sinners. Long enough were the righteous mingled with the wicked; sufficient was the evil time in which the wheat was choked with the tares; quite long enough was the period in which the chaff laid upon the same floor, side by side with the wheat. Patience had its perfect work. They did both grow together until the time of the harvest; it is not necessary now that harvest has come, that they should lie together any longer. It were inconsistent with the perfect joy and the beatific state of the righteous, with its perfect calm and purity, that sin should be admitted into their midst, or that they should be permitted to find companionships in the abodes of evil. It were not glorious to the Lord Jesus Christ, that they should cease from beholding his beauties and adoring his person, in order to succor his enemies, and comfort his desperate foes.

27-31. *Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

if men will not believe the witness of God, it is impossible that they should believe the witness of man. If the voice of God from the top of Sinai and his voice by Moses in the book of the Law, if his voice by the divers prophets in the Old Testament, and especially his own word by his own Son, who hath brought immortality to light by the gospel, cannot convince men, then there is nothing in the world that can of itself accomplish the work.

No, if God speak once, but man regardeth him not, we need not wonder that we have to preach many a time without being regarded; and we should not harbour the thought that some men who had risen from the dead would have a greater power to convince than the words of God. If this Bible be not enough to convert you, apart from the Spirit? (and certainly it is not) then there is nothing in the world that can, apart from his influence; and if the revelation which God has given of his Son Jesus Christ in this blessed book, If the Holy Scripture be not in the hands of God enough to bring you to the faith of Christ, then, though an angel from heaven, then, though the saints from glory, then, though God himself should descend on earth to preach to you, you would go on unwed and unblest. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

Luke 17

1. *Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offenses will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!*

Since the Fall, we are so constituted that there are sure to be differences and disputes. It is a great mercy when men dwell together in unity. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is.” It is a work of grace; but nature has its lustings, and lustings lead to strivings; And so, as long as the world is as it now is, “it is impossible but that offenses will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come.” Let us not, therefore, be either offense givers or offense takers. When anyone offends us, let us say, “It is impossible but that offenses will come,” and let us make light of it; and let us be very careful that we do not cause others to offend. As for him through whom the offense comes—

2. *It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.*

To bless a little one is to entertain the Savior himself. To set one’s self to pervert the simple, or to molest the humble, will be the sure way to a tremble doom. Little ones which believe in Jesus are specially under his guardian care, and only the desperately malicious will attack them, or seek to make them stumble. Such an evil person will gain nothing, even should he win the easy victory he looks for: he will, on the contrary, be preparing for himself a terrible retribution. It were better for him that the biggest of milestone, such as would be used in a mill worked by an ass, were hanged about his neck, and that he, himself, were then hurled overboard, and drowned in the depth of the sea. He will surely, sink infamously, sink never to rise again. The haters of the humble are among the worst of men, for their enmity is unprovoked. They may hope to rise by oppressing or duping the simple-hearted; but such conduct will prove their

certain destruction sooner or later. It is the lowly Lord of the lowly who pronounces this condemnation; and he is soon to be the Judge of quick and dead.

3, 4. *Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent: thou shalt forgive him.*

Perhaps someone remarks, “It looks as if he would do nothing else but keep on sinning and repenting.” Well, suppose he does so, that is precisely what you are doing, except that you do not go often repent when you sin.

So, possibly, the offender is rather better than you are, after all, and if God is gentle in his dealings with you, you may well be gentle in your dealings with your neighbor.

5. *And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.*

They seemed so struck with the severity of this command that they asked for more faith that they might be able to obey it. And, dear friends, that is always the best thing to do. Do not refuse obedience to the Lord’s precept, but say, “Lord, increase my faith that I may be able to obey it. It can be done, or else thou wouldst not have given me the command. I cannot do it as I am without an increase of strength, therefore, as faith is the medium by which strength is received, Lord, increase my faith.”

6. *And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.*

Meaning that anything and everything should be possible to our faith; but we need much more of it than the most of us have. Remember how holy Bernard says, “If thou hast a hard task, ask God to give thee a hard resolution.” The diamond is difficult to cut, but it can be cut if you can find something harder. So, if there be a very difficult task set us, if we get faith that is more than equal to it, it will be accomplished. “With God all things are possible,” which means not

only that God can do all things, but that we also can do all things when God is with us.

7, 8. *But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, who he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink?*

This world is the place of service; we are not to be expecting to have the festival here. The great supper comes at the end of the day. This is the time for us to serve, even as Jesus did when he was here; and we are to serve right on till the close of the day, even as Jesus did.

9. *Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not.*

When the serving-man has done his day's work, his master does not say, "I am very grateful to you, John, for what you have done for me." He will have his wages, they will be his master's thanks.

10. *So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*

"When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you." Ah! but we have not come anywhere near that yet; even if we had, we should still be "unprofitable servants." In our mind we should expect no thanks from our Master; but we should sorrow that we had not served him better.

11, 12. *And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:*

Lepers were allowed to enter villages, but not to go into the large walled towns. They were, however, commanded to stand at a certain distance from other people; and these men did so. This must have been a terrible sight, ten men afflicted with such a horrible disease all in one group. It shows how prevalent at that time was this disease, now happily so rare, at least among us: “Ten men that were lepers.” It seemed as if the effect of sin in men became more conspicuous in the day when the Great Healer of men was here in person. Then Satan’s chain was lengthened that he might have greater power over the bodies of men, that his Master might subdue him, and that Christ Jesus the Lord might have the greater victory over the prince of darkness.

13, 14. *And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, go show yourselves unto the priests.*

There was a tacit promise in that that they should be healed, for, of course, the showing themselves to the priests was not that they might be pronounced unclean, for they were so pronounced already by their own confession, but that they might be pronounced clean. They were to go to the priests, and there was an implied promise that, if they so went, when the priests looked upon them they would be healed.

And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

What a wonderful thing that must have been!

15, 16. *And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.*

He was probably the only one out of the ten that was a Samaritan. Though Jews and Samaritans did not usually agree, yet, as sorrow brings a man strange bedfellows, so in this case, these partners in a general sorrow forgot their sectarianism, and were blended into one sad company. Now that they were all healed, only one felt true gratitude to God, and to his Benefactor: “and he was a Samaritan.”

It is very singular to notice that Luke tells us that this man glorified God "with a loud voice." We have sometimes heard complaints that, at certain revival meetings, the singing was very loud and there was even shouting.

Let the converts shout, brother, let them stout! They have good reason to shout, for Christ has made them whole. We have a great deal too much of respectable death about us, let us have a little even noisy life. I would sooner by half hear the praises of God shouted with a loud voice, than hear the mockery of praise in a tone that is scarcely to be heard, while some machine grinds out music to God's glory, and men forget to sing or are drowned in loud bursts of wind from the instrument. Do not be ashamed to let it be known that you are saved. Praise the Lord with all your might; and, if they say that you are excited, tell them that you are, and that you wonder if anybody could help being excited if he had been healed of leprosy or had his sins forgiven.

But, at the same time, note the humility as well as the zeal of this man: he "fell down on his face at his feet." I would like to see more of this action. In some revivals, there is plenty of shouting, but very little falling down on the face at Christ's feet. Oh, for deep prostration of spirit, a humble waiting upon God, a gracious, tender confession of thanks to him for all that he has done for poor leprous sinners!

17, 18. *And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save the stranger.*

Often those who are thought to be the worst of people turn out the best. Many of the most precious pearls have been found in the deepest sea; and some of the most grateful hearts have been discovered among those who were most immersed in sin and error.

19. *And he said unto him, arise, go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole.*

Christ uses the word "whole" in an emphatic sense: "Not only thy body, but thy soul also is made whole, and thou art holy from this day." There is a wonderful connection between these two words "whole" and "holy." A holy man is a whole

man, and he who is not holy is unsound, and not whole in the sight of God. The Lord make us wholly holy for Christ's sake!

20–23. *And when he who demanded of the Pharisee, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them.*

It is a grand thing to have such faith in Christ that, you have none to spare for impostors. It is important not to distribute your faith too widely. Those who believe a little of everything will, in the end, believe nothing of anything. If you exercise full faith in that which is sure and steadfast, false Christs and false prophets will not be able to make you their dupes.

24. *For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.*

When he comes, we shall know who he is, and why he has come. There will be no longer any mystery or secret about the coming of the Son of man. There will be no need to ask any questions then; no one will make a mistake about his appearing when it actually takes place. Christ's coming will be sudden, startling, universally visible, and terrifying to the ungodly: "as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven." His first coming to judgment at the destruction of Jerusalem had terrors about it that till then had never been realized on the earth; his last coming will be more dreadful still.

25. *But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.*

Though our Lord purposely left much with regard to his coming indefinite, he gave his disciples two instances, from the early history of the world, of the condition in which many would be found at his appearing.

26–32. *And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.*

Though the King did not reveal the time of the coming of the Son of man, he declared plainly that history would repeat itself, and that "as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." When he comes, he will find many unprepared, even as the antediluvians were when "the flood came, and destroyed them all."

Christ's coming, like the flood, will be sudden, unexpected, universal in its effects, and terrible to the ungodly, although they will be utterly unconcerned: "They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage." That which is lawful and right, under other circumstances, becomes a positive evil when it takes the place of preparation for the coming of the Son of man. Woe unto those whose eating and drinking do not include the bread and the water of life; and who marry or are given in marriage, but not to the heavenly Bridegroom!

28-32. *Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife.*

This portion of our Savior's words appears to relate to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Christians in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and villages

availed themselves of the first opportunity for eluding the Roman armies, and fled to the mountain city of Pella, in Perea, where they were preserved from the general destruction which overthrew the Jews. There was no time to spare before the final investment of the guilty city; the man “on the housetop” could not come down to take anything out of his house, and the man in the field” could not return back. They must flee to the mountains in the greatest haste the moment that they saw “Jerusalem compassed with armies “(Luke 21:20).

33. *Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.*

If to escape from death he gives up Christ, and so finds a continuance of this poor mortal life; by that very act he loses true life. He gains the temporal at the expense of the eternal. On the other hand, he who loses life for Christ’s sake does in the highest sense find life, life eternal, life infinitely blessed. He makes the wisest choice who lays down his life for Jesus, and finds life in Jesus.

34-36. *I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.*

The division between the godly and the ungodly, at the coming of Christ, will be very precise. The believing laborer shall be taken by the angels to join the hosts of the redeemed, while his unbelieving fellow-workman shall be left to the judgment that will swiftly be poured out upon him. “Two women shall be grinding together;” they may be fellow-servants in a rich man’s mansion, or they may be mother and daughter or two sisters in a poor man’s home; but however closely they may have been attached to one another, if one is saved by grace, and the other is still under the sentence of condemnation, “the one shall be taken, and the other left.” This separation will be eternal; there is no hint of any future reunion.

37. *And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.*

Judaism had become a carcasse, dead and corrupt; fit prey for the vultures or carrion-kites of Rome. By-and-by, there will arrive another day, when there will be a dead church in a dead world, and “the eagles” of divine judgment “will be gathered together” to tear in pieces those whom there shall be none to deliver. The birds of prey gather wherever dead bodies are to be found; and the judgments of Christ will be poured out when the body politic or religious becomes unbearably corrupt.

Luke 18

1. *And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;*

“Not to faint” in their expectation of answers to their supplications, and therefore give up prayer; but to persevere in presenting their petitions at the throne of grace, because prayer is never lost labor. There may be a time during which God does not appear to answer prayer, but he will ultimately answer it; therefore, “men ought always to pray, and not to faint” in prayer. If they do not pray, they will faint in many ways. Their courage will faint. All their hope as to the future will faint, and fall into a dead swoon as it were. So, dear friends, you have your choice between praying and fainting. The doctrine our Savior laid down was “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;” and this is the parable which he related in illustration of that truth—

2. *Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:*

It is a great pity for any city and for any country where the judges do not fear God, where they feel that they have been put into a high office in which they may do just as they please. There were such judges in the olden times even in this land; God grant that we may not see any more like them!

3. *And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.*

Probably someone had come, and taken away from her the little bit of land that her husband had left her, upon the produce of which she and the children might have lived; and she could not get it back again. So she comes to the judge, and

cries, “Avenge me of mine adversary.”

4, 5. *And he would not for awhile:*

He had plenty of applicants who could pay him better than this poor woman could, so he disregarded her petition; but he little knew that, in her, he had to deal with a woman who meant to be heard, and who intended to press her suit until she won it. She was evidently a very determined character. Though a broken-hearted widow, yet she was not broken-spirited even though the judge refused for awhile to attend to her plea.

but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

She seems to have gone to him so often that he grew quite fatigued and pained by her persistence; the Greek words are very expressive, as though she had beaten him in the eye, and so bruised him that he could not endure it any longer. Of course, the poor woman had not done anything of the kind; but the judge thus describes her continual importunity as a wounding of him, as an attacking of him, an assault upon him, for he had perhaps a little conscience left. He had, at least, enough honesty to confess that he did not fear God, nor regard man, and there are some, of whom that is true, who will not own to it; but this judge admitted it, and though he was but little troubled about it, he said, “that I may not be worried to death by this woman’s continual coming, I will grant her request, and avenge her of her adversary.”

6. *And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.*

He is unjust, but he is obliged to be just now. He is hard-hearted, but he is compelled to yield. The widow has conquered him, not by her money, but by her importunity. She is there so often that she troubles him, and he says he must give in, and grant her request.

7. *And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night*

unto him, though he bear long with them?

He may seem to be slow about it; but when his people cry to him, he will hear them ultimately if he does not at once. Do not imagine that the children of God will always be laughed at, and downtrodden. God will yet arise, and take their side. They may be pushed into a comer for awhile, but they shall come out into a large room in due season, for God will certainly avenge his own elect.

8. *I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*

If anybody could find it, he would, for he creates it all, and he knows where to look for it; yet there is so little of it that even he, whose eyes can detect the faith that is as small as a grain of mustard seed, can scarcely find it. There is all too little real faith in the world; and those who think they have most of it, when they get into troubled waters, soon find they have not any to spare, and much that they thought was faith does not turn out to be so. O men, brethren, fathers, how little do we trust our God compared with what he deserves!

9. *And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:*

It seems as if these two things went together, and that, as our esteem of ourselves goes up, our esteem of others goes down; the scales seem to work that way.

10. *Two men went up into the temple to pray;*

They were both alike in going up to the temple, but they were very different in coming back from the temple. It is a very important thing to come to the house of God in a right state of heart; and it is a still better thing to go away from the Lord’s house really benefited and improved. These two men went up to the temple with the same object; each of them went there “to pray.” Both intended to pray, though they did not both do so; yet that was their ostensible object.

the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.

A tax-gatherer, one of the most hated people in Christ's day, because none but the lowest class of Jews would collect taxes for the Romans; and, as a general rule, they farmed the taxes, and greatly increased them by demanding of the people much more than was due. They were therefore held in the worst possible repute. I am not sure that tax-gatherers are the objects of much love anywhere; but, among the Jews, they were detested because they were collecting tribute for the Romans whom the conquered nation abhorred.

11. *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.*

So it is evident that he noticed one person who was there, though I do not find that the publican took any notice of him. We can tell by this remark that the mind of the Pharisee was wandering from his supposed devotions.

It is a bad sign in a so-called worshipper when he knows a great deal about other people who are in the Lord's house. I have known many people, whose recollection, after a sermon, has been quite as much about who was there, and who was not there, as it has been about what was in the sermon, and what was not in it. So this Pharisee's eyes went gadding about, and he spied out the poor publican; but, after a contemptuous reference to him, he returned to the catalogue of his own virtues and excellences—

12. *I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

There his prayer ended, and he stood in a most enviable state of contentment, delighted with himself, lost in the contemplation of his own ineffable purity. I think I see him in all his glory, yet I quickly turn to the other part of the temple, further away from the most sacred place, for there I behold the true worshipper.

13. *And the publican, standing afar off*

Just on the edge of the crowd, keeping as far away as he could from the most holy place—

would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.

That was all prayer; it was a prayer for mercy, it was a prayer in which the suppliant took his right place, for he was, as he said, “a sinner.” He does not describe himself as a penitent sinner, or as a praying sinner, but simply as a sinner, and as a sinner he goes to God asking for mercy.

Our English version does not give the full meaning of the publican’s prayer, it is, “God be propitious to me,” that is, “be gracious to me through the ordained sacrifice;” and that is one of the points of the prayer that made it so acceptable to God. There is a mention of the atonement in it, there is a pleading of the sacrificial blood. It was a real prayer, and an acceptable prayer, while the Pharisee’s boasting was not a prayer at all.

14. *I tell you, this man*

This publican, sinner as he had been, though he had no broad phylacteries like the Pharisee had, though he may not have washed his hands before he came into the temple, as no doubt the Pharisee did—this man, who could not congratulate himself upon his own excellence, “this man”—

went down to his house justified rather than the other:

He obtained both justification and the peace of mind that comes from it. God smiled upon him, and set him at ease concerning his sin. The other man received no justification, he had not sought it, and he did not get it. He had a kind of spurious ease of mind when he went into the temple, and he probably carried it away with him, but he certainly was not justified in the sight of God.

for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The great Lord and Master acts as he would have his true servants do. It was said of some of them that they turned the world upside down, and that is exactly what he does. He abases those who exalt themselves, and he exalts those who abase

themselves; he lifts up the lowly, and casts down them of high degree in their own estimation; and so shall it be to the end of the world.

15. *And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. Were not these children too little, and too unimportant for Christ to notice?*

Their understanding was not sufficiently developed to know anything that he might say; what was the use of bringing them for his blessing?

16. *But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*

The kingdom of God consists of child-like spirits, persons like these children. Instead of needing to grow bigger in order to be fit to be Christians, we need to grow smaller. It is not the supposed wisdom of manhood, but the simplicity of childhood, that will fit us for the reception of divine truth. Alas! we are often too much like men, if we were more like children, we should receive the kingdom of God far more readily.

17 *Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.*

We do not enter into the kingdom of God by working out some deep problem and arriving at its solution not by fetching something out of ourselves, but by receiving a secret something into us. We come into the kingdom by the kingdom's coming into us it receives us by our receiving it. Now, if this entrance into the kingdom depended upon something to be fetched out of the human mind by study and deep thought, then very few children could ever enter it; but it depends upon something to be received, and therefore children may enter.

18. *And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*

Here was one who thought himself first, yet he had to go last; yea, and even to

go away sorrowful. He was a self-sufficient gentleman: he seemed to feel that one good thing from him would be enough, and that he could and would do it at once. He had some misgivings, or he would not have asked the question, “What shall I do?” Perhaps, even in so admirable a life as his own, something might yet be lacking. But if it should turn out to be so, he could readily supply the lack.

He was very respectful, and addressed the Lord Jesus as “Good Master.” So far, so good. His question was of great personal importance. “What shall I do to inherit eternal life” Oh, that more young men would ask a similar question! It was a very suitable enquiry for an earnest person, such as he undoubtedly was. He sought eternal life, and could not be content with the honors of the hour. He only wanted to know what to do to win that eternal life, and he would set about it at once.

This is a hopeful enquirer. Surely he will be a grand, convert! Let us wait a little, and we shall see.

19. *And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good none is good, save one, that is, God.*

Our Lord cared not for empty compliments, and so he asks, “Why callest thou me good?” Many modern heretics praise Jesus, and their commendations are such an insult to his glorious person that he might well say, “Why callest thou me good? “Did this man really mean it? If so, the Lord Jesus would let him know by a hint that he to whom he spake was more than man. The argument is clear: either Jesus was good, or he ought not to have called him good; but as there is none good but God, Jesus who is good must be God.

20. *Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother.*

Our Lord turns to the ancient Decalogue. He quotes the second table of the law first, and begins with commands which would appear to the young man to be the mere commonplaces of morality. The last-quoted command summarized the rest, and it ought to have opened the questioner’s eyes to his short comings; for who has loved his neighbor as himself? The young aristocrat was not, however,

convicted of sin. He pressed his enquiry as to salvation by works because he thought himself on the road to winning it.

21. *And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up.*

Perhaps he spoke the truth, as he understood the law. He had maintained an excellent moral character from his early boyhood. He felt that in act and deed he had kept all those commands without a fault of any consequence. He was no braggart, but could honestly claim to have led a commendable life. He was, no doubt, a very exemplary person, and so amiable that Jesus looked on him very lovingly. We know some who are like him, and may be described "as touching the law, blameless." But he was not all he thought himself to be: he did not love his neighbor as himself, as he would soon be made to see.

22. *Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing:*

Christ gives him a test. If he is what he thinks he is, he will be ready to obey whatever command God lays upon him. Christ is about to lay one upon him; let us see whether he will obey that.

22. *Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.*

Our Lord brings him to the test of the first table of the law: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." If he did this, he would be willing, at a divine command, to part with his property, even as Abraham was ready to offer up his son. Our Lord Jesus, as God, claimed from him an unusual sacrifice. Did he love God sufficiently to make it? The command of our Lord was a challenge to self-righteousness to prove its own profession. We may also regard it as putting on its trial his profession to have loved his neighbor as himself. Did he love the poor as well as himself? If so, it would be no hardship to sell his possessions, and give to the poor. We must not infer that Jesus would have all his followers part with all that they have: it was a test for this one man. Still, if we love our possessions more than we love God, we are idolaters; and if we hug our property so as to let the poor hunger, we cannot be said to love them as ourselves.

23. *And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.*

He could not go the whole length of his own plan. He would be saved by works; yet he would not carry out his works to the full of the law's demand. He failed to observe the spirit both of the second and the first table. He loved not his poor brother as himself; he loved not God in Christ Jesus with all his heart and soul. He thought himself first; but he soon stood behind the last, for he was very sorrowful. Thus the Savior tests character. That which glittered so much is not found to be gold. This man's great possessions, so possessed him that he never possessed his own soul.

24. *And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!*

Worldly possessions, apart from divine grace, have a deadening, hardening, hampering influence upon the soul. Some rich men do enter into the kingdom of heaven, but it is hard for them; very hard indeed. The temptation is to let riches rule the mind; and when that is the case, the kingdom of this world opposes the kingdom of heaven. Houses and land, and gold and silver, act as bird-lime to the soul, and prevent its rising towards heaven. This is especially the case in persecuting times; but it is sufficiently a fact in all periods of human history.

For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

Our Lord uses an expressive proverb, which means precisely what the words convey to the common reader. There is no sense in hunting up abstruse metaphors where the proverbial teaching is as plain as possible. He would show that wealth is far more a hindrance than a help to those who would enter into the kingdom of God: in fact, such a hindrance as to render the matter practically impossible without divine interposition. A camel is not only large, but it has humps, and how can it go through so small an opening as the eye of a needle? It could not make such a passage except by a strange miracle; nor can a rich man enter into the kingdom of God except by a marvel of grace.

How few of the rich even hear the gospel! They are too great, too fine, too busy, too proud to regard the lowly preacher of the gospel of the poor. If, perchance, they do hear the heavenly message, they have not the necessities and tribulations which drive men from the present world to seek consolation in the world to come, and so they feel no need to accept Christ. “Gold and the gospel seldom do agree.” Those who are rich in this world, in the vast majority of instances, scorn to become subjects of the kingdom in which faith is riches, and holiness is honor.

Should the rich begin the divine life, how hard it is for them to persevere amid the cares, the luxuries, the temptations of a wealthy position! The difficulties are enormous when we think of the pride of life, the flattery of rank, the danger of power, the risk of carnal security. Yet, blessed be God, we have seen rich men become poor in spirit! We have seen camels go through this needle’s eye, humps and all! We hope to see many more such miracles of almighty grace.

And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved?

No common astonishment filled them Much astounding truth they had already heard from their Master; but this exceeded all, and they were exceedingly amazed. They had previously thought that wealth was an advantage: and now they judged that if those who had riches could only be saved with surpassing difficulty, poor working-men like themselves could have no hope whatever. They were ready to despair; and therefore they put to their Lord the very natural question, “Who then can be saved?” Even our Lord’s disciples felt themselves bewildered by his plain utterance, so hard is it to get rid of prejudices in favor of wealth.

And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

Jesus told them that God could do that which, apart from him, would never come to pass. To enter the kingdom is impossible to man unaided: one sin or another blocks the way. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are a sadly effective barrier to the soul when it attempts to enter the city of holiness; but God can cause those barriers to yield, and enable the soul to enter by the narrow way. He is mighty to save. With God all things, are possible. What a joyful truth for the writer and the reader! Our salvation, when we view our own

weakness and the power of sin, is impossible with men. Only when we turn to God and his grace, does salvation range among the possibilities.

28. *Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee.*

Here is another claimant for a front place. Peter answered, adding, as he seemed to think, a question needful for the full discussion of the subject. Peter speaks for his brethren: “Lo, we have left all, and followed thee,” we have done what the rich young man refused to do. He spoke as the representative of a number who had become poor for the kingdom’s sake: surely these must have a large reward. Little as these first believers had to leave, it was their all, and they had forsaken it to follow Jesus: Peter would fain hear what their recompense would be.

What Peter said was true, but it was not wisely spoken. It has a selfish, grasping look, and it is worded so barely that it ought not in that fashion to have come from a servant to his Lord. After all, what have any of us to lose for Jesus compared with what we gain by him? “What shall we have?” is a question which we need not raise, for we ought rather to think of what we have already received at our Lord’s hands. Himself is reward enough to the soul that hath him.

29, 30. *And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.*

Our Lord regards Peter as spokesman for them all, and he therefore answered them all: “he said unto them.” Seeing their questioning state of mind, he begins with, “Verily I say unto you.” He condescendingly meets their somewhat selfish enquiry. They needed not to doubt but what there would be a large and full reward for those who had followed him. His first adherents would have high rank, and should sit as assessors with the great Judge in the day of his exaltation. Those who share his humiliation shall share his glory also.

31–33. *Then he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophetic concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished. For he shall be*

delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again.

Our Lord Jesus Christ often talked to his disciples about his death. Before the time for it came, he foresaw it, he thought and spoke much of it, he even dwelt upon the terrible details of it very minutely: "He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death." Ah! dear friends, when our Lord Jesus died for us, he knew what he was doing.

There are some men who, without a moment's consideration, could do a brave notion, but they could not sit down and coolly calculate all the consequences of doing it. They find themselves unexpectedly in the face of imminent danger, they see a person needing to be saved from peril and they make a rush for it, and the daring deed is done. But here our Savior deliberately thinks and talks about his death, yet he never flinches, or looks back, but he prepares his heart for the solemn event, and sets his face like a flint to go through it all that he may save the souls of his people. We also ought to think and talk much of our Lord's death, since he thought and spake so much of it.

34. *And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.*

It would be hard to imagine our Lord speaking more plainly. He tells them of his sufferings in detail—describes exactly what happened. But their thoughts did not run that way; and when you are not expecting a thing, it little matters how very plainly you may be told of it. You are doating upon something else, and, therefore, you do not readily perceive the meaning.

You know how; when you are expecting to hear a thing said, you can hear it even at a great distance, or think you hear it, from the very motion of the man's lips. But if he should say something clean contrary to what you expect, then you do not so readily hear. And these disciples of our Lord were looking to see him made a king, and they could not comprehend that the only crown he was to have would be one of thorns, and that the homage paid to him would be to be scourged and to be spat upon. They did not understand. And de not you think

that the run of our thoughts sometimes may be so contrary to divine truth that we may not be able to understand some very plain things in the Bible, which are only difficult to us because our thoughts are not yet running that way? And when one day we shall be more completely cleansed from the grossness of this world, many a riddle will become plain enough to us.

35, 36. *And it came to pass, that as he was come nigh, unto Jericho, a certain blind man sat by the way side begging: and hearing the multitude pass by, he asked what it meant.*

If he could not see, he could hear, and he could speak. Use all the ability that you have, and God will give you more.

37, 38. *And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.*

He did not need to be told twice who was passing by, nor did he need any exhortation to seek Christ's help. It was enough for him that Jesus of Nazareth was near him; so he would cry to him for the help he alone could give. Oh, that we were half as sensible, Oh, that the blindness did not get into men's hearts! If it were not so, every blind soul would at once begin to cry to God for mercy; there is not one poor sinner here, who knows that Jesus often passes this way, who would not begin at once to cry, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me."

39. *And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace:*

I think I hear them saying, "Do not make such a disturbance. The Master is preaching, and we are losing his words through your noise. What is all that clamor about? Can you not have more respect to the Son of David than to cry in that fashion?"

But he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.

That is a good thing for you also to do, not only to keep on crying to the Lord

Jesus, but to grow more importunate when others rebuke you. If you are seeking the Savior, do not be put back, and if others would hinder you, be the more resolute, the more determined, to be heard by him.

40, 41. *And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto him: and when he was come near, he asked him, saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee! And he said, Lord, that I may receive my sight.*

There was no waste of words. He said what he meant, and he meant what he said, and he knew what he wanted. It is a great thing, in prayer, to know what we really need—a very important thing to be sensible enough not to multiply words, but to cry to the Lord with a definite object, as this blind man said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight."

42, 43. *And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight:*

Notice the echo. 'The blind man said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Jesus said, "Receive thy sight." With a little turn in the expression, Christ's answer is the echo of our prayer.

thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God:

Christ his only to speak, and the great work is done at once. The salvation of a soul from the power of sin is not the work of weeks; it can be done in a single moment. "Immediately he received his sight, and followed him." That is beautiful; as soon as he could see, he looked for Christ, and then followed him, "glorifying God." He clapped his hands, and followed Jesus, shouting and crying, "Blessed be God, I have found my sight! The darkness is over, and the light has broken in upon my soul."

and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.

That was a blessed praise-meeting, brought about by the healing of that one man. Now that his eyes were opened, he showed that his mouth was not closed. He

proved that he could pray well; now he proves that he can also praise well. He prayed when they tried to stop him, and now nobody shall stop him from praise; and he so praised the great Physician that, with the flaming firebrand of his gratitude he set all other hearts in a blaze: “All the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.”

Luke 19

1. *And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.*

There was to be a miracle at each end of Jericho. Long before, it had been cursed; now it was to have a double blessing.

2. *And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus which was the chief among the publicans and he was rich.*

Jesus Christ had just blessed a blind man who was poor, so poor that he was a common wayside beggar; will he bless the rich man, too? Oh, yes! he knows no distinction of persons, he is ready to bless all classes; whether they be rich or poor is nothing to him.

3. *And he sought to see Jesus who he was;*

Possibly he had not much respect, but he had great curiosity; he would like to see the man about whom everybody was talking: “He sought to see Jesus who he was.”

and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.

The crowd round about him was so thick that the little short man could not see over the heads of the tall people. Though he pushed, and tried to get in front, there was always some bigger body before him, so that he could not see the great Teacher.

4. *And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him:*

for he was to pass that way.

Do you not see the little short man running in front of the throng, and climbing up a tree that stood in the way? Rich men do not generally climb trees, but here was a man whose curiosity overcame his dignity, so he “climbed up into a sycamore tree.”

5. *And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him,*

Cannot you imagine that you see the blessed Master stopping, and looking up at that tree? Somehow, he always made himself one with those whom he meant to bless. When he spoke to the blind man, he stood as if he were himself blind, and asked him, “What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?” And now he stops under this sycamore, and looks up at curious Zacchaeus as if he, too, were taken with a fit of curiosity, and asks, “Who is that up in this tree?” “He looked up and saw him,”—spied him out—

and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.

Remember that the Lord Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, to suffer and to die; and there he was the patient, suffering Lamb of God; but here he speaks in that commanding tone which well became the Prince of the House of David: “Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.”

His surprise at receiving such a message must have been overwhelming, yet he did not suffer that surprise to delay his obedience to Christ’s command.

6. *And he made haste, and came down; and received him joyfully.*

A great change had been suddenly wrought in him; the opening of the blind man’s eyes was not at all more remarkable than the renewing of the heart of Zacchaeus: “He made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.”

7. *And when they saw it, they all murmured*

There is a great contrast between this verse and the last one in the previous chapter: “All the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.” Here it is, “When they saw it, they murmured.” Yet, very likely, many of them were the same people; certainly, they were the same sort of people that we hear of every now and then: “When they saw it, they all murmured.” There are far too many of that kind about still; we do not quite know who they are, nor where they are, they have a sort of nondescript, mysterious existence that finds expression in the words, “They say so-and-so and so-and—so.” They have been saying something about the minister, something about the Sunday-school, something about the Bible-class, something about your work and mine. You see, there always were such people about, and they always would talk, and their talk often took the form of complaining: “When they saw it, they all murmured,”

saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

If he had not done so, he could not have gone anywhere, for all men are sinners. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” But this man was a sinner above others, for he had sold himself to the hated Roman power, and was authorized to collect the conqueror’s taxes from his own people; so, of course, in the estimation of the Jews, he was the worst kind of sinner that could be found anywhere.

8. *And Zacchaeus stood*

And he did not talk at all like a sinner,—

And said unto the Lord; Beheld, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor,

Some of those saints, as they reckoned themselves, had not done anything like as much as that: “The half of my goods I give to the poor;”—

and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.

He acts in charity and justice, for he is determined to do the right thing with his substance. You see, he was a rich man, so his money was a source of trouble. The blind beggar had no such difficulty, for he had not any money that he must distribute when he was converted; but this rich man—this camel, as our Savior called such men, went through the eye of a needle by the grace of God, and thus the Lord proved the reality of his conversion.

9. *And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.*

"He does not look like it, he has become a tax-gatherer for the Romans, he has oppressed his own countrymen. But he is a son of Abraham, and salvation has come to him."

10. *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*

If, at this time, we ask our Lord Jesus, "Whither goest thou, Divine Master?" his answer still is, "I am come to seek and to save that which was lost." "Art thou come after those who think themselves good enough without thee?" He shakes his head and says, "I am a Physician, and the whole have no need of a Physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." The gospel of the grace of God is for the guilty; if you are not guilty, there is no gospel for you; but if you are guilty, and confess it, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

11. *And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.*

Their minds were full of thoughts concerning Christ's coming as a King, and they had very mistaken notions concerning his kingdom, so he indicates to them that, for the present, the practical matter to be remembered was that he had come "to seek and to save that which was lost." If they had not been so full of their idle dreams of a temporal sovereignty, they would have perceived that, in the calling of Zacchaeus,

Christ had manifested his Kingship in the realm of mercy, and had there exercised the sovereignty of his grace. In order that they might be able the better to understand the meaning of his spiritual kingdom, and not have their eyes so dazzled by the illusions which had so long deceived the Jews, our Lord pointed out to them, in the parable of the pounds, the practical way of preparing for his second coming.

12, 13. *He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.*

"Use these pounds on my account; be stewards of them for me until I return." The servants were his, and the goods also were his; his slaves could not claim as their own either their persons or their possessions; all belonged to their lord, and were to be used for him.

14, 15. *But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.*

It would have been well if our translators, instead of using that ugly Latin word, "occupy," had kept to the expression, "trade with it," for here we get the same words again: "that he might know how much every man had gained by trading."

There is a reckoning-day coming. Jesus is coming back from the far country whither he has gone; his own word is, "Behold, I come quickly." We must not leave this great fact out of our reckoning; and as his stewards, we must be prepared at any moment for him to come and reckon with us as to the talents with which he has endowed each of his servants.

16. *Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten*

pounds.

The genuine servant, with due humility, puts himself in the background. It is not he who has “gained ten pounds;” it is his lord’s pound that has done it. He is pleased to bring the ten pounds; yet he claims no credit for himself, but says, “Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.”

17. *And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.*

There is no comparison between the servant’s work and the reward for its faithful performance. That ten pounds, if his lord had given it all to him, would not have bought a house in a village, unless it had been a very tiny one—“a cottage in a vineyard,” or “a lodge in a garden of cucumbers;” yet his lord gives him “authority over ten cities.”

18, 19. *And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.*

How he must have opened his eyes, when he received authority over five cities!

20. *And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:*

The napkin, with which he ought to have wiped away the sweat from his brow, he had used merely as a wrapper for the pound that his lord had entrusted to him for the purpose of trading with it. He had done nothing with the pound; he thought he was all right because he had not done any harm with his lord’s money. He had not joined the revolting citizens, who said, “We will not have this man to reign over us;” he had not spent the pound, nor embezzled his master’s money; in fact, he had been very careful to keep intact the treasure that had been entrusted to him, and he felt proud of his own prudence, and said, “Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin.”

21. *For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up*

that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.

So there is a slavish kind of fear, a dread, a horror of God, which will even keep men out of his service. It ought not legitimately to do so, but, undoubtedly, there are some persons who, out of an evil timidity, are afraid to attempt anything for God or man, and hence their life is useless. Their talent cankers and rusts in the napkin in which they have wrapped it.

This was impudence indeed; but his master took him on his own ground, and showed that, even if his statement had been true, he ought to have been the more diligent in obeying his lord's command.

22, 23. *And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?*

"Thou mightest have done that, at any rate, even if thou wast afraid to trade with it, as I bade thee." God often deals with men on their own ground, and condemns them out of their own mouth. They say that God is very severe in threatening them with "the wrath to come." Well, if you so believe, and so speak, there is the more reason why you should fear to disobey him, and so to incur his just displeasure. If, in spite of such terrible threatenings, you still defy him, it only brings out the more clearly the greatness of your guilt.

24, 25. *And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.)*

They were quite astonished. "What! give more to the man who has so much already?" "Yes," says the master, "that is my command."

26. *For I say unto you, That unto everyone which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away*

from him.

Hear again the note of sovereignty. Christ will do as he wills; and his mode of action shall sometimes be so singular that even his own attendants will wonder at the strangeness of his procedure, and will begin to ask, “How is this?” But, as Elihu said to Job, “He giveth not account of any of his matters.”

27 *But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.*

Whatever these words mean, it is certain that there is a terrible doom in store for all who are God’s enemies, May none of us be found among them!

28-31. *And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, when he was come nigh to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount called the mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying, Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither. And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose him? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him.*

Here we see Christ’s true royalty again flashing out from beneath the humiliation of his humanity. He lets us know that, although he is going up to Jerusalem to die, it is not because he is not Lord of all; but that, being Lord of all, he makes himself of no reputation, takes upon himself the form of a servant, is made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbles himself, and becomes “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

32–34. *And they that were sent went their way, and found even as he had said unto them. And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, Why loose ye the colt? And they said, The Lord hath need of him.*

The word of the King was again with power, and the owners of the colt were willing to let the animal go since the King had “need of him.” They may have been secret disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we have no information upon that point. Our King’s warrant runs anywhere; and even when his personal presence is not consciously realized, his royal and divine word still rules the minds and hearts of men.

35. *And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon.*

They added actions which naturally grew out of their King’s orders. There must be fit caparison for the steed which is to be employed for such a royal procession, so they cast their garments upon the colt. This was done of their own accord. Many are ready to fetch other men’s colts, but slow to lend their own clothes; these disciples were willing and eager to bear their share in the triumphal procession of the Lord Jesus. From first to last there was no forced contribution or mercenary service; all was most voluntary: the colt was cheerfully lent, and the garments were spontaneously placed thereon. All was simple and natural, full of truth and heartiness. How different from the artificial ceremonials of ordinary monarchs!

They set him thereon. When men previously had tried to take Jesus by force, to make him a king in earthly fashion, he withdrew himself from them; but the hour for his public entry into Jerusalem had arrived, and he therefore allowed his disciples to set him upon the lowly beast that was to carry him into the city. Gladly they put the Lord in the place of honor, and joyfully they walked at his side.

36-38. *And as he went, they spread their clothes in the way. And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen. Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.*

They were so jubilant that they seemed to have caught some notes from the song

that the angels sang at the Savior's birth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." There had been war in heaven, but these disciples of Christ sang, "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest."

39–41. *And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples. And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,*

What a contrast! The King's courtiers shouting for joy, and the King himself weeping over the guilty city where the greatest tragedy in the history of the whole universe was about to take place. The King saw, in the near and more remote future, what no one else could see, so, "when he was come near, and beheld the city, he wept over it."

42–44. *Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*

Josephus tells us that Titus at first tried to save the temple, even after it was set on fire, but his efforts were of no avail; and at last he gave orders that the whole city and temple should be levelled, except a small portion reserved for the garrison. This was so thoroughly done that the historian says that "there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited." We sometimes delight in the temporal prosperity of the Church as if it were something that must certainly endure; but all that is external will pass away or be destroyed. Let us only reckon that to be substantial which comes from God, and is God's work. "The things which are seen are temporal"

45. *And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold*

therein, and them that bought;

Jesus went into the temple of God again, as he did at the beginning of his ministry. Then the reforming Prophet intimated what was needed, and now the King proceeds to carry it out. A temple dedicated to God must not become a place of merchandise and robbery.

What an awe must have surrounded this one Man, that the whole tribe of traffickers should flee before him while the, endured the overturning of their tables and their seats! Neither the temple guard, nor the Roman soldiers appear to have interfered in any way. When Jesus takes to himself power, opposition ceases. What a prophecy this incident affords of the sense with which, in his Second Advent, he will purge his floor with the fan in his hand!

46. *Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.*

Our Lord, while he drives out the profaners of the temple, vindicates his holy violence by saying, “It is written.” Whether he was contending with the arch-enemy, or with wicked men, he used but one weapon, “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” In this, as in everything else, let us follow his example. Isaiah had penned those words (Isaiah 56:7), “Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.” This prophecy had a special relation to the Court of the Gentiles, which was being so grossly desecrated by these dealers. Our Savior likened his Father’s house, when occupied by these buyers and sellers, to those caves in the mountains where robbers were wont to lurk in his day: “Ye have made it a den of thieves.” The words spoken by the King were strong, but not more so than the case before him required. It is a king’s business to break up the hiding-places of bandits, and Jesus did so. He could not bear to see his Father’s house of prayer made into a haunt of robbers.

47, 48. *And he taught daily in the temple. But the chief priests and the scribes and the chief of the people sought to destroy him, and could not find what they might do: for all the people were very attentive to hear him.*

There was a popular wave of enthusiasm in his favor; but, alas! it soon ebbed away, and then the multitudes that had cried, “Hosanna!” were just as loud in their shouts of “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Luke 20

1, 2. *And it came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders, and spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?*

Jesus returned to his Father's house, and there he was again met by his old antagonists. When he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him; they had rallied their forces, and taken time to recall their courage. They interfered with him as he was teaching, and demanded his authority for what he said and did. He had taken their breath away by his daring purgation of the temple, unarmed and unaided; and only after a night's interval dared they question his right to act as he had done. Now they put him to the question: "By what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?" That he did marvelous things was admitted; but in what official capacity did he act, and who placed him in that office? This was carrying the war home: they struck out fiercely at their assailant. They hoped to wound him in this point, and to overcome him. Poor fools! They were not worthy of an answer from him.

3. *And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me:*

Yes, Jesus answered. His answers are always complete, but seldom what his foes expect. The quibblers of our day need not be in too great a hurry to call their statements unanswerable: Jesus will answer for himself in due time. He says to these chief priests and elders, "I will also ask you one thing." Their question was met by another question, even as the rods of the Egyptian magicians, when

turned into serpents, were met by Aaron's rod, which, as a serpent, swallowed up their rods. Frequently it will be wisdom not to reply to the quibblings of the enemies of the gospel, but to pose them with some mystery too deep for them.

4-8. *The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not? But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet. And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was. And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.*

The question our Lord put to the chief priests and elders was simple enough had they been honest men; but as they had a game to play, they could not reply without great difficulty. Men-pleasers are obliged to be politicians, and see which way the land lies. Our Lord put his questioners on the horns of a dilemma. If John the Baptist was sent from heaven, why had they rejected him? That John was of men, they dared not assert; for their fear of the people silenced them. They were in a corner, and saw no way of escape, and therefore they pleaded ignorance: They answered Jesus, and said, "We cannot tell."

Which answer was no answer from them, but supplied him with a just and crushing reply to them: "Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things." They could have told Jesus whence John's baptism was, but they would not; and he could have told them all about his divine authority, but he knew that no useful end would be answered, and therefore he declined to stay more. It is a solemn thing when love itself grows weary, and refuses further conversation. Our Lord's tone to these questioners is that of one who is dealing with hopeless creatures, who deserve no quarter, since they would make no use of leniency. They could not be won by gentleness; they must be shaken off exposed, and dethroned from the seat of power, before the eyes of those who had been misled by them.

9. *Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time.*

The owner went into a far country and committed the estate to husbandmen who were to take care of it for him and yield to him a certain share of the produce as the rent. Thus the great Lord of Israel left the nation under the care of priests, and kings, and men of learning, who should have cultivated this heritage of Jehovah for him, and yielded up to him the fruit of this choice vineyard. God for a while seemed gone from his chosen people, for miracles had ceased; but this should have made the scribes and priests the more watchful, even as good servants are the more awake to guard the estate of their master when he is away.

10. *And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard:*

The householder waited till near the full time in which he could expect a return. The time of the fruit drew near; and as the husbandmen sent him none of the produce of the vineyard, he sent his servants to receive the fruits of it, and bring them to him. These servants, as the lord's representatives, ought to have been received with due honor; but they were not. The leaders of the Jewish nation for a long time rendered to the Lord no homage, love, or service. Prophets were sent of God to Israel, but their message was refused by the rulers of the people.

but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty.

The husbandmen, the persons in charge and authority, kings, priests, and teachers; these united in doing evil to the owner's servants. They were not themselves his "servants"; they deserved not so honorable a title. Those to whom the vineyard was leased were traitors to the chief landlord, and did violence to his messengers; for in heart they desired to keep the vineyard to themselves.

11. *And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty.*

They grow bolder, and more wicked, you see; first beating, and then adding shameful treatment to their former cruelty. Men do not come to ridicule religion, and persecute its advocates, all at once; this is an art which Satan teaches by degrees.

12. *And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out.*

The lord of the vineyard was patient, and gave them further opportunities to mend their ways. Failure to bring back the fruit was not the fault of the first messengers, for other servants were rejected even as they had been. The householder was very anxious to win the husbandmen to a better state of mind, for he increased the number of his representatives, sending more than the first, trusting that the evil men would yield to repeated calls. No good came of this effort of kindness; for the badly-disposed husbandmen only continued their murderous cruelty: they did unto them likewise. It was evidently a bad case. The Jewish people would not hearken to the voices of the Lord's servants, and their rulers not them the example of persecuting the men whom God had sent to them.

13. *Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do?*

A strange thing happens when the Lord himself comes to a pass, and says, "What shall I do?" Here is infinite wisdom, as it were, at a non-plus; and in that extremity this is the Lord's last expedient—

I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him.

The sending of his son was the householder's last resort. He might have resolved at once to punish the evil-doers; but his action proved that mercy had triumphed over wrath. The sending of Jesus to Jerusalem was God's ultimatum. If he should be rejected, judgment must fall upon the guilty, city. It seemed impossible that his mission could fail. Can they go the length of doing despite to the Heir of all things? Will not his own beauty and majesty overawe them?

14. *But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.*

Things turned not out as a loving heart might have hoped. Evil worked itself to

its consummation. When the husbandmen saw the son; that is to say, as soon as the chief priests and Pharisees perceived that the true Messiah was come, they said among themselves what they dared not say openly. The very sight of the heir of all things fired them with malice. In their hearts they hated Jesus, because they knew that he really was the Messiah. They feared that he would dismiss them, and assume possession of his own inheritance, and therefore they would make an end of him: “This is the heir:, let us kill him.” Once get him out of the way, they hoped to keep the nation in their own hands, and use it for their own purposes: therefore they inwardly said, “Let us seize on his inheritance.” They knew that he was “the heir”, and that it was “his inheritance”; but their knowledge did not prevent them from seeking to snatch the vineyard away from its rightful owner. Our Lord pictured to the life what was passing in the minds of the proud ecclesiastics around him, and he did not hesitate to do this to their faces. No names were mentioned, but this was personal preaching of the best kind.

15. *So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.*

The Lord Jesus becomes prophetic, as by the parable he foretells the success of their malice. The husbandmen were hasty in carrying out their wicked plot. No sooner said than done. They cast him out in their Council in the hall of Caiaphas, and when he was led without the gate of Jerusalem; they slew him at Calvary; for theirs was the crime, though the Romans did the deed. Thus the Heir was slain, but the murderers did not long retain the vineyard; swift justice overtook them.

What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?

There is a time when the lord of the vineyard cometh. To those chief priests that hour was drawing very near: the question for them to think of was, “What will he do unto those husbandmen?” As a class, the religious leaders of the Jews were guilty of the blood of a long line of prophets, and they were about to crown their long career of crime by the murder of the Son of God himself: in the destruction of Jerusalem the God of heaven visited them, and dealt out just punishment to them. The siege of the city and the massacre of the inhabitants was a terrible avenging of the innocent blood which the people and their rulers had shed.

16. *He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others.*

And he did so; he scattered abroad the Jews, and gave the kingdom, for a while at least, unto the Gentiles, and they hear the gospel which the Jesus refused.

And when they heard it, they said, God forbid.

That is exactly what you and I would say, for we, too, have ill-treated the blessed Lord of the vineyard and his beloved Son. Lest we should have the heritage taken from us, let us yield up the fruit to him who has the best right to it all.

17. *And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?*

Our Lord reminds them of David's language in Psalm 118:22, 23. They were professedly the builders, and they had rejected him who was the chief corner-stone. Yet the Lord God had made the despised one to be the head of the corner. He was the most conspicuous and honored stone in Israel's building. Against the will of scribe and priest this had been accomplished. They might rage, but holy minds adored, and said, "It is marvelous in our eyes."

18. *Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*

Those who stumble over Christ, the chief corner-stone of the Church, are injured: they suffer grievous bruising and breathing, but he remains unhurt. Opposition to Jesus is injury to ourselves. Those upon whom he falls in wrath are ground to powder; for the results of his anger are overwhelming, fatal, irretrievable. Oppose him, and you suffer but when he arises in his might, and opposes you, destruction has already come to you.

19, 20. *And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to*

lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them. And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor.

Our Lord's words did not move them to repentance; but only increased their malice and hatred against him. Their hearts were hardened, and their consciences soared; so they took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. They would not acknowledge that Christ was the wisdom of God and the power of God; had they done so, they would not have attempted their impossible task. They, saw that, to ensnare Jesus in his talk. If he had been as faulty as we are, they might have succeeded; for men who wish to entrap us in our talk need not consult much about how to do it.

21. *And they asked him, saying, Master, we know that thou sayest and teachest rightly, neither acceptest thou the person of any, but teachest the way of God truly:*

They began with fair speeches. They addressed Jesus by a title of respect, "Master": they only used the word in hypocrisy; but they professed to regard him as a teacher of the Law, and an authority on disputed points of doctrine or practice. They also admitted his sincerity and truthfulness: "We know that that thou sayest and teachest rightly." They then lauded him for his impartiality: "neither acceptest thou the person of any." "Thou wilt speak without any regard for what Caesar, or Pilate, or Herod, or any of us may think, or say, or do." Thus did they try to throw him off his guard by what they uttered in sheer flattery. All that they said was true; but they did not mean it. From their lips it was mere cajolery. Let us take note that, when evil men are very loud in their praises of us, they usually have some wicked design against us. They fawn and flatter that they may deceive and destroy.

22. *Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?*

They referred to the annual capitation tax, imposed by the Romans, which was the cause of great indignation among the Jews, and led to frequent insurrections.

Judas of Galilee (Acts 5:37), one of the many pretended Messiahs, had taught that it was not lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, and he had perished in consequence of his rebellion against Rome. Christ's questioners may have hoped that some such fate should befall him.

Their question was a delicate and difficult one in many ways. Any answer whatever would bristle with points by which his enemies hoped to entrap him. If he said, "It is lawful," then they would denounce him as in league with the oppressor of his people, and a traitor to the Theocracy of which they boasted, even though they had virtually cast off the divine rule over then. If he said, "It is not lawful," they could accuse him to the Roman governor as exciting the multitude to rebellion. This was, in fact, one of the false accusations brought against Jesus when he was before Pilate: "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding, to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a king." If he remained silent, they would twit him with being a coward who did not dare to say what he thought, lest he should offend his hearers. Very cleverly was the net spread; but those who had so cunningly made and laid it little thought that they were only setting a snare in which they themselves would be caught. Thus doth it often happen, as David said, "The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands."

23. *But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me?*

Our great thought-rending King was not to be deceived either by their flattery or their crafty questioning. Malice and deceit designed his overthrow; but he saw through the cunning of his enemies, and perceived the wickedness that prompted them thus to assail him. Onlookers may not have perceived their craftiness, and our Lord's disciples may have been puzzled as to how he would reply; but, as in all other trying circumstances, Jesus himself knew what he would do.

24. *Shew me a penny.*

This request on his part would make the whole matter more vivid and impressive to the bystanders. When there is something to see and handle, a lesson becomes the more striking. Our Lord asked them to show him a specimen of the coin usually paid for the capitation tax: and they brought unto him a penny, a

denarius. This coin represented the daily pay of a Roman soldier, and in the parable of the vineyard it was said to be the daily wage of the laborer. Had these men guessed the use to which Jesus would put the denarius, they would not have so quickly procured one for him. They bought their own confusion with that coin. They would never afterwards be able to look upon the tribute money without remembering how they were foiled in their attempt to entangle the hated Nazarene.

Whose image and superscription hath it?

Before them were the image and inscription of the Roman emperor on the piece of money; but he would make them say as much, so he asks, "Whose is this?" The Jewish Rabbis taught that "if a king's coin is current in a country, the men of the country do thereby evidence that they acknowledge him for their lord." When we are dealing with ungodly men, it is well if we can make them to be their own accusers.

They answered and said, Caesar's.

No other answer was possible. This tribute money was not a shekel of Jewish coinage, but money of the Roman empire. This was a plain proof that, whether they liked it or not, they were Roman subjects, and Caesar was their ruler. What then must follow but that they should pay to their acknowledged ruler his due?

25. *And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's.*

Whatever belongs to Caesar is to be rendered, to him. Jesus did not say what was Caesar's; the coin itself settled the question of paying tribute. His reply covered all the duties of loyal subjects to the ruler under whose jurisdiction they lived; but this did not touch the sovereignty of God. Jehovah held rule over consciences and hearts; and they must see to it that, as Caesar had his own, the Lord had his own also. Render therefore "unto God the things that are God's." This was not an evasive reply on Christ's part; it was full of meaning, and very much to the point; and yet it was so put that neither Pharisees nor Herodians could make anything out of it for party purposes, or for their wretched design of

entangling Jesus in his talk. Neither of the two sects turned a penny by their penny.

To us the lesson of this incident is, that the State has its sphere, and we must discharge our duties to it; but we must not forget that God has his throne, and we must not allow the earth-kingdom to make us traitors to the heaven-kingdom. Caesar must keep, his place and by no means go beyond it; but God must have the spiritual dominion to himself alone.

26. *And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace.*

They had some sense left even if they had no feeling. They saw that their plot had ignominiously failed; they marveled at the wisdom with which Christ had baffled their cunning; they knew that it was hopeless to continue the conflict: so they held their peace. They had already admitted, in their a flattering speech, that he was a true teacher of God's way; and now they completed their own condemnation.

27. *Then came to him certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him,*

He had silenced the Pharisees and the Herodians; now there came to him the Sadducees, the broad churchmen, the rationalists of our Savior's day: which say that there is no resurrection. They rejected a great deal more of the teaching of the Scriptures than this one point of the resurrection; but this is specially mentioned here as it was the subject on which they hoped to entrap or confuse the Savior. The Sadducees "say that there is no resurrection"; yet they came to Christ to ask what would happen, in a certain contingency, "in the resurrection." They evidently thought that they could state a case which would bring into contempt the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. They might have taken warning from the experience of the Pharisees and the Herodians; but doubtless they felt so sure of their own position that they expected to succeed though the others had so conspicuously failed.

28. *Saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die,*

having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

"Master;" they came with affected respect for the great "Teacher." They were as polite as the previous company of assailants; but, like them, though the words of their mouth were smoother than butter, war was in their heart: though their words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords (Psalm 55:21).

"Moses wrote": they gave the substance, though not the exact words recorded in Deuteronomy 25:5. The law of Moses, in this as in many other shatters, recognized existing customs, and imposed certain regulations upon them. For a man to die without leaving a child to bear his name, and enter upon his inheritance, was regarded as so great a calamity that the Jews judged that every possible means must be taken to prevent it. The practice here described prevails among various Oriental nations even to this day.

29-33. *There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they left no children, and died. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife.*

These Sadducees may have known such a case as they stated, though it is extremely unlikely; more probably, this was one of the stock stories they were in the habit of telling in order to cast ridicule upon the resurrection. They had no belief in spiritual beings; therefore, they supposed that, if there were a future state, it would be similar to the present. Having stated their case, they put to the Savior this perplexing question: "In the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife." They doubtless thought that this question would puzzle Christ, as it had puzzled others to whom it had been put; but he had no more difficulty in answering this than he had with the previous enquiries.

34-36. *And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead,*

neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.

Our Lord implied that there is a resurrection; he did not even stay to prove that truth, but went on to speak of the resurrection life as being of a higher order than our present natural life: they “neither marry, nor are given in marriage ... for they are equal unto the angels.” Our Savior’s answer struck at another Sadducean error; his questioners did not believe in angels. Jesus did not attempt to prove the existence of angels; but took that fact also for granted, by saying that, “in the resurrection “men” are as the angels of God in heaven.” He did not say that they are changed into angels; but, as Luke records his words, “they are equal unto the angels.” They are spiritual beings, as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15.

37, 38. *Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.*

Jesus might have referred to many passages in the Old Testament about the resurrection; but as the Sadducees regarded the Pentateuch with special honor, he quoted what Moses had recorded in Exodus 3:6: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;” and then added his own comment and exposition: “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had long been dead when the Lord spoke to Moses out of the burning bush. His words implied that the patriarchs were still living. His covenant was made with those who still existed.

There is much teaching in this truth, that “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Some suppose that, until the resurrection, the saints are virtually non-existent; but this cannot be. Though disembodied, they still live; Jesus does not argue about it, but he states the fact as beyond all question. The living God is the God of diving men; and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive, and identified as the same persons who lived on the earth. God is the God of Abraham’s body as well as of his soul, for the covenant seal was set upon his flesh. The grave cannot hold any portion of the covenanted ones; God is the God of our entire being, spirit, soul, and body.

39, 40. *Then certain of the scribes answering said, Master, thou hast well said. And after that they durst not ask him any question at all.*

Our Lord's reply to the Sadducees was so complete that they were put to silence. They did not attempt any further assault upon him, for they must have been convinced of their own impotence. But even the scribes, who complimented Christ upon his answer, saying, "Master, thou hast well said," did not follow up that confession by becoming his disciples.

41. *And he said unto them, How say they that Christ is David's son?*

The King now carried the war into the enemy's country. He had answered all the questions put to him; it was his turn to propound some to those who had come to examine him. Our Lord here sets his servants the example of how they should deal with cavilers, quibblers, objectors.

42-44. *And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?*

These questions of our Lord themselves contain the answers to the present-day critics who deny the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, and the Davidic authorship and Messianic application of certain Psalms. Quoting from Psalm 110:1, "saying, The LORD said unto My Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool," our Savior declared that these were the words of David, concerning the Christ, the Messiah. This ought for ever to settle the question about the inspiration, authorship, and application of that Psalm at least. "The LORD said unto my Lord," — Jehovah said unto my Adonai: David, by the Holy Ghost; learned what the Father said unto the Son; and thus he was brought into connection with the whole sacred Trinity. "Sit thou on my right hand": the Messiah was bidden to rest after his great mediatorial work was accomplished, and to sit on his Father's right hand, in the place of honor, power, and majesty. "Till I make thine enemies thy footstool": Jesus is to keep his seat till his foes are all prostrate at his feet.

This was the problem the Pharisees had to solve: if the Messiah was David's

Son, how was it that David, by the Holy Ghost, called him his Lord? The Christ must be something more than mere man; otherwise the Psalmist's words would have been unsuitable, and even blasphemous. He was higher than the angels, for unto none of them did Jehovah ever stay, "Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool "(Hebrews 1:13).

45-47. *Then in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples, Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; which devour widows' houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.*

We often hear foolish people say "You must always preach in love, and not say anything against anybody; Jesus did not denounce anybody." Oh, dear! then what about this denunciation of the scribes? Were Jesus here today, he would not be the molluscus creature that some people want us to be. He had a backbone, and a conscience, and a very heavy right hand, and he brought that hand down, like a sledge-hammer, upon cant and hypocrisy and error, and if we would be like Christ, we must be manly, and bold, and outspoken. They tell us this in order that we may easily glide through the world, and that all men may speak well of us. But so did their fathers to the false prophets; and do you suppose that we who preach God's Word, are going to keep back any part of our testimony because it will bring us into ill repute with the ungodly? God forbid! We live for something higher and nobler than being fed upon the breath of evil men. If there be error in high places, if there be vice anywhere, it is the duty of the minister of Christ, in his Master's name, to attack it with all his might. Here we find our Lord and Master plainly declaring that the scribes, the great masters of the law, were a set of pretentious hypocrites who robbed even the widow and the fatherless, and who would, in due time, "receive greater damnation." Even so must the truth still be spoken, whoever may be offended by it.

Luke 21

1, 2. *And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.*

Doubly poor, because she was not only a widow, but in poverty.

3, 4. *And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this, poor widow hath cast in more than they all: for all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God:*

Christ measures what we really give by what we have left—by the proportion which what we give bears to what we possess:

but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.

So she gave more than any or all the others did.

5, 6. *And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.*

This was literally true of the temple at Jerusalem; and today there remains nothing of it. It is also true of all earthly buildings and of all earthly things. However firm they appear to be, as though they might outlast the centuries themselves, yet the things which are seen are temporal, and like the baseless

fabric of a vision, they shall all melt into thin air, and pass away. “The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

7. *And they asked him, saying, Master, but when shall these things be and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?*

Those questions are always being asked, they are being asked at this very day about Christ’s second coming. They shall have no answer, for Christ himself assures us that, as the Son of man, he knew not the day nor the hour of his own coming. As the Son of God he knew all things; but as a man like ourselves, he was willing to be a know-nothing upon that point.

8. *And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ’s; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them.*

This passage refers, in the first place, to the siege of Jerusalem and in its second and yet fuller meaning, to the coming of the Lord. It looks to me that our Lord regarded the destruction of Jerusalem as “the beginning of the end,” the great type and anticipation of all that will take place when he himself shall stand in the latter day upon the earth. And, as before the destruction of Jerusalem there were many false christs, so will there be the more of them the nearer the end of the world shall be. This shall be to us one of the tokens of our Lord’s speedy appearing, but we shall not be deceived thereby. “Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them.”

9. *But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified; for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by.*

Everywhere throughout the Scriptures there is this double message of our Lord —“Watch, for I may come at any moment. Expect me to come, and to come soon; yet never be terrified as though the time were immediately at hand, for there are certain events which must occur before my advent.”

How to reconcile these two thoughts, I do not know, and I do not care to know. I

would like to be found in that condition which consists in part of watching and in the other part of patiently waiting and working till Christ appears.

10, 11. *Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great sights shall there be from heaven.*

Someone says, perhaps, “All this we have had, times without number; yet Christ has not come.” Just so, for these signs are not sent to minister to our curiosity, but to keep us always on the watch; and whenever we mark these earthquakes, and wars, and famines, and pestilences, then are we to think, “Behold, he cometh,” and watch the more earnestly. You know how it is often with the man who is very sick. It is reported that he cannot last long; you call many times, yet he is still living, do you therefore conclude that he will not die? No, but you the more certainly expect that he will soon be gone. So is it with Christ’s second advent. He bids us note the signs of his coming, and yet, when some of those signs appear, he does not come, all this is to keep us still on the alert watching for him. Even in his own day, when he so spoke that his servants expected him to come at once, yet he also added words from which they might fairly judge that he would not come directly.

12–15. *But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name’s sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what He shall answer: for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.*

Nowadays, the fashion is always to meditate, and think, and excogitate a gospel for yourself. To be a thinker—that is the very crown of perfection to some minds, but it is not so according to our Master’s mind. His servants are to speak, not their own thoughts, but his thoughts. If they will keep to his gospel, he will give them a mouth and wisdom, which all their adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. We are to be the repeaters of a message which is given to us,

not the manufacturers of tidings. There is to be an exhibitions of inventions very soon, and it is quite right and proper that there should be; but I pray that none of us may ever be the inventors of a new gospel, or of new doctrines, or of new systems of theology, but, on the contrary, let us settle it in our hearts that we will speak Christ's Word all our days; and if thereby we are brought into trouble, we will depend upon him to give us a mouth and wisdom, which all our adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.

16. *And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends and come of you shall they cause to be put to death.*

How true that has been many a time! For how long a period the saints were martyred! And the days of martyrdom are not yet over.

17, 18. *And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish.*

During all the terrible siege of Jerusalem, it is believed that not one Christian perished, for God took special care of the followers of his Son. They were the most hated of all men, yet nobody could touch them. None of them took up arms, for it was contrary to their religion; as, indeed, if we are Christians, it is contrary to our religion to resist evil, but we are to bear and endure. The early Christians did so; and because of their very defencelessness, they were safe under the guardian care of the Lord their God.

19–22. *In your patience possess ye your souls. And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto. For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.*

As soon as Christ's disciples saw "Jerusalem compassed with armies,", they knew that the time for them to escape had arrived; and they did "flee to the

mountains." The Christians in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and villages, "in Judea ", availed themselves of the first opportunity for eluding the Roman armies, and fled to the mountain city of Pella, in Perea, where they were preserved from the general destruction which overthrew the Jews.

23. *But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.*

It must have been a peculiarly trying time for the women who had to flee from their homes just when they needed quiet and rest. How thoughtful and tender was our pitiful Savior in thus sympathizing with suffering mothers in their hour of need!

24. *And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*

And it is so even to this day. Here is another instance in which the Lord bade his people expect his coming, and yet at the same time told them that he would not come so long as Jerusalem should be trodden down of the Gentiles. "Until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" means the time when the Messiah shall gather in those Gentiles unto himself; for, when he shall appear, they shall look on him whom they have despised, and turn to him whom they have so long rejected.

26-32. *And there shall be signs in the sun*

As there were at the destruction of Jerusalem, and as there will be at the second coming of Christ. We have had a rehearsal of that coming in the destruction of the favored city; but the grand event itself, who shall rightly speak of it?

And in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's heart failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And

then shall they see

Whether they wish to see him or not, “then shall they see”—

27–32. *The Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.*

As I understand it, for the first time; and afterwards it shall be fulfilled again. It is a prophecy that bears two meanings, an outer and an inner; it has been fulfilled once, and it shall soon be fulfilled again.

33, 34. *Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life*

Please notice that “cares of this life” are put down with over-eating and over-drinking, for men can be intoxicated and surfeited with care, either the care of getting, or the care of keeping, or the care of spending, or the care of losing. Any of these cares may cause a surfeit and a drunkenness wherefore, “take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life,”—

and so that day come upon you unawares.

All that you can see in this world, you are to regard as being doomed to destruction; that destruction commenced, so to speak, when Jerusalem fell beneath the Roman sword. Everything earthly is doomed. You are living, not in your eternal mansions but you are living a makeshift life; you are passing

through a wilderness, you are pilgrims, you are sojourners; this is not your rest. Do not get to love this world, or to be taken up with it. Do not strike your roots into it; you are not to dwell here, and to live here always. You are walking among shadows; regard them as such. Hug them not to your bosom; feed not your souls upon them, lest, when that day comes, before whose coming all of them shall melt away, you shall be filled with amazement and shame.

35–37. *For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of man. And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives.*

You know what he did there, for—

"Cold mountains and the midnight air,
Witnessed the fervor of his prayer."

Jesus ever practiced what he preached. He said to his disciples, "Watch ye therefore, and pray always," so he himself both watched and prayed.

38. *And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him.*

May we all be willing, not only to hear him, but also to heed what he says!

Luke 22

1, 2. *Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and scroll sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people.*

Dastardly fear often drives men to the greatest crimes. He who is not brave enough to be master of his own spirit, and to follow the dictates of his own conscience, may do, before long, he little knows what. Because of the fear of the people, the chief priests and scribes were driven to compass the death of Christ by craft, and to bring him to his death by the cruel betrayal of Judas, one of his own apostles.

3–6. *Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude.*

Was it not a sad thing that the betrayer of Christ should be one of the twelve? Yet deeply trying as it must have been to the heart of Christ, there is something useful about even that horrible transaction. It says to all the professing Church of Christ, and it says to us who claim to be Christ's followers, "Do not think yourselves safe because you are in the visible church; do not imagine that even holding the highest office in the church can prevent you from committing the basest crime. Nay, for here is one of the twelve apostles, yet he betrays his Master. Sometimes, we have found this betrayal to be a source of comfort. I have myself desired, in receiving members into the church, to be very careful if possible only to receive good men and true; yet, though pastors and elders of the

church may exercise the strictest watch, some of the worst of men will manage to get in. When that is the case, we say to ourselves, “No new thing has happened to us, for such a sinner as this marred the Church from the very beginning.” Here is Judas, when Christ himself is the Pastor, when the twelve apostles make up the main body of the Church, here is Judas, one of the twelve, ready to betray his Master for the paltry bribe of thirty pieces of silver, just the price of a slave. Yes, we might have been put out of heart in building up the Church of God if it had not been for this sad but truthful narrative concerning Judas and his betrayal of our Lord.

7, 8. *Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.*

Notice how carefully our Lord respected the ordinances of that dispensation so long as it lasted. The passover was an essential rite of the Jewish faith, and our Lord therefore duly observed it. Learn hence, dear brethren, to esteem very highly the ordinances of God’s house; let baptism and the Lord’s supper keep their proper places. You do them serious injury if you lift them out of their right places, and try to make saving ordinances of them; but, in avoiding that evil, do not fall into the opposite error Of neglecting them. What Christ has ordained, it is for his people to maintain with care until he comes again; and if he kept up the passover even when, in himself, it was already on the point of being fulfilled, let us keep up the ordinances which he has enjoined upon us. If any of you have neglected either of them, let me remind you of his gracious words, “Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness,” and “This do ye, in remembrance of me.”

9–13. *And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he shall show you a large upper room furnished; there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.*

Observe in this passage a singular blending of the human and the Divine; no mention is made of either as a matter of doctrine, but incidentally our Lord's Divinity and humanity are most fully taught. Here is Christ so poor that he has not a room in which to celebrate the most necessary feast of his religion; he has made himself of no reputation, and he has no chamber which he can call his own; yet see the Godhead in him. He sends his messengers to a certain house, and tells them to say to the goodman of the house, "Where is the guest-chamber?" It all turns out just as he said it would be, and he is welcomed to this man's best room, and to the furniture thereof. Jesus speaks here as did his Father when he said to Israel in the olden time, "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." All the guest-chambers in Jerusalem were really at Christ's disposal; he had but to ask for them, and there they were all ready for him. Here we see the majesty of his Deity; but, inasmuch as he had no room that he could call his own, we see also the humility of his manhood.

14, 15. *And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:*

This was to be his last meal with his disciples before he died, and he had looked forward to it with great desire. It was a most solemn occasion, and yet to him a most desirable one. May something of the Master's desire overflow into your hearts, beloved, whenever you are about to partake of the sacred feast which he instituted that night!

16. *For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*

And it is fulfilled, for Christ himself is the Lamb of our Passover. His blood has been shed and sprinkled; his people have been brought up out of their Egyptian bondage; and, by faith, they feed upon him, and are glad. How sweetly the passover melted away into the Lord's supper, and how graciously did our Savior thus teach us that, as a rule, he does not make violent changes in the development of his people's spiritual life, but he leads them on gradually from one stage to another! There may be, sometimes, very sudden elevations; but, as a general rule, we go from strength to strength, a step at a time; and the truth is revealed to us little by little.

17, 18. *And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.*

This was the passover cup—the cup with which they concluded the paschal supper. At such times, they also usually began to chant a Psalm in happy unison. Just at that point, Christ interjected the first part of the celebration of the new ordinance—the Lord's supper, into which the paschal supper was to melt.

19. *And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brakes it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you this do in remembrance of me.*

It was clearly impossible that he could have meant that bread to be literally his body, because his body was there at the table. Therefore, the misunderstanding, or misrepresentation, of the Church of Rome is altogether without excuse. Our Savior plainly intended to say, "This bread represent my body; it is an emblem, a symbol, of my body." If this had been spoken concerning the bread after Christ had been dead and gone, and not before, there might have been some warrant for the teaching of the Papists; but there cannot be any such warrant, as he used the words while he was sitting there with his apostles. Let us be careful not to lose the true meaning of Christ's words, while we combat the false interpretation that has been given to them.

20. *Likewise also the cup after a upper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.*

He could not have meant that, literally, that cup was the new covenant; I never heard of anybody who thought he did. Why, then, take one part of the ordinance literally, if not the other? But our Lord did mean that the contents of that cup represented the blood, which seals and ratifies the eternal covenant on which our hopes are built.

21. *But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.*

Lamentable circumstance—sad index of what often still occurs! The worst traitors to Christ are not outside, but inside the visible church; there they have the best opportunity for doing mischief; there they can give the unkindest cut of all. God grant that none of us may be among that miserable number!

22. *And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined; but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!*

The fact that it was determined, in the eternal decrees of God, that Christ should die, did not at all diminish the responsibility of all had a share in bringing about that death. Learn, beloved, to believe firmly in Divine predestination without doubting human responsibility. Even though you may not be able to show how these two things agree, do not be anxious about that matter; be satisfied to believe what you cannot understand. Both these things are true, and they are both of them in this verse.

23, 24. *And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*

Be astonished, dear friends, as you read, in such a connection as this, "There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." What! while yet the anxious question as to which of them was the traitor was being passed round, "Lord, is it I?" Is it so closely followed by another question, "Which of us shall be highest in the kingdom?" Oh, the awful intrusiveness of pride sad ambition! How it will come in, and defile the very holy of holies! Nay God prevent our falling victims to it! The last question for a Christian ever to ask is, "How may I win honor among men?" The one question for a believer should be, "How can I glorify my Master?" Very often, that can best be done by taking the very lowest place in his church.

25, 26. *And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that*

doth serve.

You know, brethren, that it always will be so. If a man tries to be great in the church, somehow or other his brethren generally think very little of him; but he who is willing to serve—whose one ambition it is to lay himself out for the glory of his Master, and for the general good—that man usually has a great deal more honor than he would have expected to receive. The way to be great in the church is to be serviceable to all around us, to be meek and lowly, to be willing to wait upon others. We have good reason for being the servants of our brethren when we remember the humble position that our Lord himself assumed.

27. *For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.*

He served in the very humblest capacity, for did he not even wash the disciples' feet? And if he, who was the greatest of all, thus condescended to perform the lowliest service, who among us shall be so lifted up as to suppose that no common work is good enough for him? Brethren, we must be humble, or else we shall be humbled. And let me remark that the latter experience is by no means a pleasant one, while the former experience is most sweet and gracious. God give us the grace to be humble!

28. *Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.*

There is a reward to the righteous, though they serve not for reward, for the Lord says—

29, 30. *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drill; at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Ah, but see what follows! No sooner, in this chapter, does the thought seem to rise than it is dashed down again; the brightness ever has a shadow cast across it.

31. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to*

have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

As our Lord Jesus looked upon his eleven apostles, he felt that their time of greatest trial was fast approaching. Beyond anything they had ever endured before, they were now to be put into the devil's sieve, and Satan would toss them to and fro, and seek, if possible, to destroy them.

32. *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not*

"I have made thee, Simon, a special object of thy prayer. All the brotherhood will be tried, but for thee I have especially prayed, for thou, who seemest to be the strongest, art the weakest of them all, so I have prayed specially for thee, that thy faith fail not."

and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

We are thinking about thrones, and about which of us shall have the loftiest throne, but see how the Master is thinking about the necessary while we are doting upon the superfluous. He thinks of our needs while we are dreaming of something great. What a blessing it is that we have our Savior praying for us when we ourselves may be fancying that we need not pray!

Our hands are ready for the scepter, and we are anxious to sit down on the throne, when the Lord knows that our proper place is at the footstool, pleading for mercy still.

33. *And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.*

That is bravely spoken, Peter; and yet it is very foolishly said, too. He spoke out of his very heart, and he meant what he said; but Peter did not know what a poor weak body Peter really was. His Master understood him far better.

34. *And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.*

Though Peter did not really know himself, Christ knew him. That is one of our comforts—that the Lord Jesus Christ foresees all future ill, and so provides against it; he looks down into our nature, and deals with us as we need to be dealt with. It is well for us that we are in his hands.

35, 36. *And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.*

At first, our Savior had great popularity amongst the people; and, under the cover of this, his disciples were received with respect and kindness so that, though they went forth without purse or scrip, they lacked nothing.

But, now, Christ warns them that there is to be a very different state of things. Jesus is about to die, and people will not be ready to entertain them; they will need to have a purse and scrip of their own. They will constantly be in peril of their lives, and they will need the sword now, and the scrip.

37. *For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end.*

“They are drawing to their close. I am about to be put to death as a transgressor, and you will be treated as though you were the off-scouring of all things, and were not fit to live, because you are my followers.”

38. *And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.*

A smile must have passed over the Savior’s face as he saw how egregiously they had misunderstood him. He did not mean that they should literally carry swords, but that they should now have to go through an alien world, and to meet with no friends or helpers. He evidently did not mean that they were to defend him with

the sword, for two such weapons would not have been “enough” against the Roman legionaries who were sent to seize him. How apt they were to misconstrue, and take literally that which he was accustomed to speak in figures, just as, to this day, some will have it that the bread on the communion table is Christ’s body and the juice of the vine is his blood.

39. *And Jesus came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.*

The garden of Gethsemane had often been the place of our Lord’s private prayer, and it was therefore well selected as the scene of his fierce struggle with the foe. Where we get strength from God in private, it may often happen that we shall have to endure our greatest conflicts. Singularly enough, it is said that the Jews had a custom of taking the red heifer to the Mount of Olives before it was sacrificed, as if they set forth in that very act the leading of Christ Jesus into Gethsemane, and the bringing him back again with his raiment all red with his own blood. We might alter the prophet’s words a little, and ask “Who is this that cometh from Olivet, with dyed garments from Gethsemane?” and the Divine Sufferer himself might answer, “I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.”

40. *And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.*

He knew what sore temptation meant, and he was about to feel it at its utmost, and he therefore exhorted his disciples to pray even as he had formerly taught them in the model prayer, “Lead us not into temptation.”

41, 42. *And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*

We can read these words in a calm, quiet tone; but they were uttered by our Lord with an intensity of agony which we can scarcely call up before our mind’s eye. So terrible was that agony, that our Savior became utterly weak and faint through the intensity of his pleading.

43. *And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.*

This is so plain a proof of Christ's condescension as a man that it has overwhelmed some persons; they could hardly understand how it could be true. Hence, I believe this forty-third verse is omitted in some versions of the Scriptures, and there have been several learned men who, while they could not disprove the existence of the verse in the most ancient manuscripts, have yet labored hard to cut it out, since they thought it too great a stoop for Christ to take. But, my dear friends, in this condescension of our Lord we learn how truly he was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Doubtless, we receive much strengthening from angels: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" And why should not Christ, who was in all things made like unto his brethren, also be strengthened by an angel?

44. *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

The Greek has the idea of the stretching of the sinews; Christ prayed to the very stretching of his nerves and sinews. As when men wrestle for their lives, so did Christ in prayer strain every power of mind and body that he might prevail. Luke alone describes this dread scene of Christ's agonizing even unto blood; but there is no doubt whatever, from this passage, that our Lord Jesus did actually sweat blood—not something like blood, but blood itself—and that in great drops and in such quantities that it did not only adhere to his flesh, and dye all his garments, but there was such an abundance of it that in great drops it fell down to the ground.

45. *And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow,*

Great sorrow may have quite opposite effects upon different men. You have, perhaps, sometimes noticed that intoxication produces upon some men exactly the opposite effect to that which it produces upon others; some become irritable and noisy, while others become taciturn and quiet. It is also quite a matter of fact

that great sorrow has various effects upon different minds. In the Savior's case, it aroused him to an awful agony of earnestness in prayer. In the disciples case, it sent them to sleep.

46. *And said unto them, Why sleep ye! rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.*

The great trial for them, as well as for their Lord, was close at hand then. It was late at night, and they were drowsy and sleepy; yet no time is amiss for supplication. Prayer is never out of season, and never unnecessary. We never know when temptation is near, so let us pray without ceasing to him who is able to preserve us from temptation, or to deliver us out of it.

47. *And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him.*

It is a remarkable fact that we do not read in Scripture that any other of our Lord's apostles—not even John—ever kissed the Savior. It seems as if the most impudent familiarity was very near akin to dastardly treachery. The eleven would have thought it a high honor to be allowed even to kiss Christ's feet; but Judas, having lost his respect for his Master, it was no very great descent for him first to sell his Lord, and then to betray him with a kiss.

Mark you, brethren, our Lord Jesus Christ is generally betrayed thus. How, for instance, do men usually begin their books when they mean to undermine the inspiration of Scripture? Why, with a declaration that they wish to promote the truth of Christ! There is the Judas-kiss, and the betrayal comes quickly afterwards. How is it that Christ's name is often most grossly slandered among men? Why, by those who make a loud profession of love to him, and then sin foully as the chief of transgressors!

48. *But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?*

Christ might put that question to many of his nominal followers in the present

day: “Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?”

49. *When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, lord, shall we smite with the sword?*

There is always that tendency, even among Christian people, to get their hands on the sword-hilt, and a good man’s hand is never more out of place than there. When he has his hands clasped in prayer, or placed upon the promises of God, then it is well; but a Christian with his hand upon his sword is something like an angel putting forth his hand unto iniquity.

50. *And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear.*

No doubt he meant to cut his head in twain, but the sword slipped, and merely took away his right ear.

51. *And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear and healed him.*

There was no lasting mischief done; but, on the contrary, another instance given of the divine power of Christ. No other miracle of this kind is mentioned in Scripture; I mean, the healing of a wound received by violence, the restoration of a member which had been cut off: and Luke is the only Evangelist who mentions it:—it has been thought that, because he was a physician, and had a quick eye for acts of healing, that he mentions that Christ touched the ear of Malchus, and healed him.

52, 53. *Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.*

“This is the time when I am given up, on the one hand to the temptations of Satan—the power of darkness—and, on the other hand, to you: ‘This is your hour.’” And, as beasts that prowl in the darkness are generally the most ravenous and fierce, so were these chief priests and captains and elders most determined in seeking the blood of Christ. Paul afterwards wrote that none of the princes of this world knew the hidden wisdom, “for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” It was just the darkness of their minds that led them thus to hunt the only Savior of sinners to his death. Satan himself would scarcely have had a hand in crucifying Christ had he understood that, by that very crucifixion, Christ would break the old serpent’s head for ever.

54. *Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priests house. And Peter followed afar off.*

I do not think that he was to be blamed for that; I do not see how he could very well have followed any nearer, for he was already a marked man. That sword-cut of his upon the ear of Malchus had made him specially prominent amongst the apostles, even if he had not been well known before. He got into the crowd, and came after his Master at such a distance as seemed safe for him.

55. *And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.*

I do think that he was to be blamed for that action, for it brought him into dangerous company. Better be cold, than go and warm your hands in ungodly society.

56, 57. *But a certain maid beheld him as he eat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him*

As the flame came flashing up every now and then, she looked at him, and Peter was troubled by her gaze: she “earnestly looked upon him,”

and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not.

See how the most courageous are often cast down by the very slightest means. The tongue of a poor feeble woman is too much for this valiant Peter, who said that he never would deny his Master, even though he should die with him.

58, 59. *And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently alarmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him; for he is a Galilaean.*

For he got talking to this ill company, and his speech had betrayed him.

60, 61. *And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest.*

Another Evangelist tells us that he began to curse and to swear, as if that was the surest proof that he could possibly give that he did not know Jesus; for, when you hear a man swear, you know at once that he is no Christian, you may conclude that safely enough. So Peter thought that, to prove that he was no follower of Christ, he would use such ill language as the ungodly speak.

And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.

God has all things in his hands, he has servants everywhere, and the cock shall crow, by the secret movement of his providence, just when God wills; and there is, perhaps, as much of divine ordination about the crowing of a cock as about the ascending of an emperor to his throne. Things are only little and great according to their bearings; and God reckoned not the crowing bird to be a small thing, since it was to bring a wanderer back to his Savior, for, just as the cock crew, “the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.” That was a different look from the one which the girl had given him, but that look broke his heart.

62. *And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

How many there are, who sin with Peter, but who never weep with Peter! Oh, if we have ever transgressed in such a way as he did, let us never cease to weep! Above all, let us begin at once to lament it, and rest not till the Master looks again, and says by that look, “I have blotted out all thy transgressions; return unto me.

63, 64. *And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?*

Upon this passage, a good man well observes that, one of these days, Christ will answer this taunt. With his unerring finger, the Judge of all shall point them out, and say to each one, “Thou art the man.” There are many of you, perhaps, who are committing sin in private, and you think it is not known. You are almost ready to ask the question of him whom you look upon as a blindfolded God, “Who is it that smote thee?” Ah! but he sees you all the while, he reads the secret the thoughts of your hearts, and the day will come when he will let you know that nothing has escaped his all-seeing eye.

66-70. *And many other things blasphemously spake they against him. And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council,*

Some of the chief priests and elders were so enraged against Christ that they went to Gethsemane with the Roman cohort that was sent to arrest Jesus; the rest of them met at the house of Caiaphas the high priest, waiting for their victim to be brought to them. It was night, or early morning; but they were only too willing to sit up to judge the Lord of glory, and put the King of Israel to shame.

saying, Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe: and if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am.

The time for Christ to speak had come. He uttered a prophecy that must have startled his accusers. He stood there bound, apparently alone and helpless before his powerful enemies, who expected soon to put him to death; yet the Prophet-King declared that they should be witnesses of his future glory, and see him "sitting on the right hand of the power of God." His hearers rightly understood him to claim to be divine, and gladly do we acknowledge the justice of his claim.

71. *And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth.*

If he had not been God Incarnate, he would have been guilty of blasphemy, and would have deserved to die. By the law of Moses, a blasphemer was to be stoned to death (Leviticus 24:16). Christ's works had proved that he was God, so his words were not those of a blasphemer; but his confession gave his enemies the opening they were seeking, and they declared him to be unworthy to live. He had foretold that he would be crucified, whereas the punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning; so further forms of trial must be gone through before the end would come.

Luke 23

1. *And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.*

Our Lord had been taken to the tribunal of Annas and of Caiaphas, and now the whole multitude of them arose and led him unto Pilate. The first two tribunals were ecclesiastical and religious. There they charged him with crimes against the law. Now they take him to Pilate, and bring accusations against him, concerning Caesar and the Roman Government. “The whole multitude of them arose and led him unto Pilate.”

2. *And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fallow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King.*

A wily charge. It was the duty of the ruler of the province to protect the province from any rebellion against Caesar; so they put it the “He perverts the nation, forbids to give tribute to Caesar.”

3, 4. *And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews?*

It must have seemed a strange question to himself, as he saw the poor emaciated form of Jesus of Nazareth standing before him. “Art thou the King of the Jews?”

And he answered him and said, Thou sayest “It is even so.” Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.

He took him aside and conversed with him, and perceived that his kingdom was not of a kind that would interfere with Caesar. As he looked at him, he found that

it was not a matter which really could concern the great Roman Empire. It was in no danger from him. Pilate said to the chief priests and the people, “I find no fault in this man.”

5. *And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.*

He caught at that.

6, 7. *When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.*

By which he answered two purposes. First, he would get out of the scrape himself; and secondly, he would compliment Herod by acknowledging that, as the man was a Galilean, he was under Herod’s jurisdiction. What devices men have to escape from responsibility! This vacillating Pilate knew the right, and did it not. He would be very glad to avoid coming to any decision about it at all.

So away the Master goes; he must be dragged through the streets again to a third tribunal. Oh! thou blessed Lamb of God! Never were sheep driven to the shambles as thou wert driven to death!

8. *And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.*

But the Lord never worked miracles yet, to gratify idle curiosity. He who would have worked a miracle to heal the poorest beggar in the street would not work a wonder to please the king in whose power he was.

9. *Then he questioned with him in many words: but he answered him nothing.*

Now was Christ the Lamb—the sheep before her shearers who is dumb. He did answer Pilate a little, There was a little that was good about Pirate, vacillating as he was; but Herod had not a trace of anything upon him upon which the good seed could possibly take root; so he answered him nothing.

10. *And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him.*

The original word is made nought of him—made him as nothing.

11. *And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.*

This robe was probably white, sparkling, splendid. It tended to mock him. It set the example to Pilate and his men to clothe him in a scarlet robe, and mock him yet again. There is a contagiousness about an evil example.

12. *And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.*

Two dogs could well agree to hunt the same prey, and sinners who quarrel on other things will often be quite agreed to persecute the gospel.

13–15. *And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, Said unto them, Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him: and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him.*

They were judges not at all inclined to favor him; but yet, though his accusers were mad again him, nothing could be brought before these two judgment-seats which would hold water for a single moment. Holy and harmless was Christ,

and, therefore, his accusers knew not what to say against him.

16. *I will therefore chastise him, and release him.*

Ah! that word “chastise” shim so glibly over the tongue, but you know what it meant, when the Roman lictors laid bare the back and used the terrific scourge? “I will scourge him,” said Pilate. Perhaps he thought that if he scourged him, his suffering would induce the Jews to spare his life.

18, 19. *And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)*

Do you not see how they refuted their own accusation? If Christ was really the leader of sedition, would they have asked that he should be put to death? Would they have preferred a murderer to him? There can be no danger of a man leading people astray when those very people were crying, “Let him be put to death.” It must have been a transparent fraud. Pilate must have loathed them. Mean as he was, he must trove seen through their meanness.

20. *Pilate, therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them.*

He seems to have gone backward and forward many times, desiring to save the life of Christ, but not having the moral courage to do it.

21, 22. *Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. But they cried, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let him go.*

He thinks a great deal of his own inconsistent conclusion, and so many men do. When they came to a conclusion, bad as it is, contradictory, they will stick to it. Adhesive to nothing but to wrong, like a pendulum swinging between right and wrong, was this Pilate. Yet he will keep on the swing. He is only steady in that —“I will, therefore, chastise him and release him.” Oh! dear friends, it would be

better for you to come to thorough decision one way or the other—Christ, or no Christ; true religion, or no religion; but to halt between the two is a lame business that will be ruinous to you.

23. *And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified.*

These men were bribed. The popular feeling was with our Lord to a very large extent, but, under the influence of threats and bribes, they found a mob to cry, "Crucify him." You know the old saying, Vox populi vox Dei," There is no truth in it. The voice of the people is not the voice of God, for they said, "Crucify him, crucify him."

Never did man's enmity to God become more clear than when God, in human flesh, descending upon an errand of mercy, must, nevertheless, be hunted down by these cruel cries of "Crucify him, crucify him." Man would be a Decide if he could. "The fool hath said in his heart, "No God.'" To get rid of God—to get rid of God, even in human form, is the enmity of man's heart. He will have it if he can.

24. *And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required.*

Again attempting to evade the responsibility by saying that they should be both accusers and judges.

25. *And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.*

Sad scene. May our hearts be broken, and made tender, and sanctified by meditation upon it.

26. *And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.*

Fit type of all Christ's followers, who must expect to carry Christ's cross, and who should be happy and honored in carrying it after Jesus.

27. *And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.*

Their best Friend, the Healer of their sick, the Lover of their children, was about to be put to death, so they might well bewail and lament.

28. *But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.*

He had the siege of Jerusalem before his mind, and, therefore, in tender pity he bade them save their tears for other sorrows.

29. *For, behold, the days are coming, in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.*

This was accounted a curse, but their curses should seem blessings unto them when compared with the curse of the dreadful slaughter at Jerusalem.

30. *Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.*

Our Savior looked forward to the terrible siege of Jerusalem, the most tragical of all human transactions. I think I do not exaggerate when I say that history contains nothing equal to it. It stands alone in the unutterable agony of men, women, and children in that dreadful time of suffering.

31. *For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*

If the Christ of God is put to death even while the Jewish capital seems vigorous

and flourishing, what shall be done when it is all dry and dead, and the Roman legions are round about the doomed city?

32. *And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.*

Every item of scorn was added to our Savior's death; and yet the Scriptures were thus literally fulfilled, for "He was numbered with the transgressors."

33. *And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary,*

The margin reads, or the place of a skull, when they were come to the place which is called a skull.

there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and he other on the left.

Come hither, soul. Thou who readest this chapter, come to this place of a skull. It is the first resting-place of every weary soul. There is no rest for the sole of your foot till first you come to Calvary, and see your Savior die.

34. *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

Do you bear the hammer fall? "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Do you see the bleeding hands and feet of Jesus? This is all that is extracted by that fearful pressure, nothing but words of pardoning love, a prayer for those who are killing him: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

His garments were the executioners' perquisites; pitilessly they took them from him, and left him naked in his shameful sorrow.

35. *And the people stood beholding.*

There was no pity in their eyes. No one of them turned away his face because he could not look upon so disgraceful a deed.

And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.

You know how mockery puts salt and vinegar into a wound. A man does not at any time like to be reviled; but when he is full of physical and mental anguish, and his heart is heavy within him, then ridicule is peculiarly full of acid to him.

36, 37. *And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.*

These rough legionaries knew how to put their jests in the most cruel shape, and to press home their scoffs upon their suffering victim.

38. *And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew,*

For these were the three languages known to the throng, and Pilate invited them all to read in “Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew,”—

THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

And so be is, and so he shall be. He has never quitted the throne. The Son of David is still King of the Jews, though they continue to reject him; but the day shall come when they shall recognize and receive the Messiah. “Then shall they look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”

39. *And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him,*

saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

Poor man; even though he is dying a felon's death, he must be in the swim with the multitude, he must keep in with the fashion, so strong, so powerful, is the popular current with all mankind.

40, 41. *But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath, done nothing amiss.*

Not only has he done nothing worthy of death, but he has done nothing improper, nothing out of place: "This man hath done nothing amiss." The thief bears testimony to the perfect character of this wondrous Man, whom he nevertheless recognized to be divine, as we shall Bee in the next verse.

42. *And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.*

It was strange that Christ should find a friend dying on the cross by his side. Nobody else spoke to him about a kingdom. I am afraid that even his former followers began to think that it was all a delusion; but this dying thief cheers the heart of Jesus by the mention of a kingdom, and by making a request to him concerning that kingdom even when the King was in his death agony.

43. *And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.*

The Master, you see, uses his old phraseology. In his preaching, he had been accustomed to say, "Verily, verily," and here he is, even on the cross, the same Preacher still, for there was such assurance, such confidence, such verity, in all his words, that he never had to alter his style of speaking. "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Well does our poet put it,—

“He that distributes crowns and thrones,
Hangs on a tree, and bleeds and groans.”

He was distributing these crowns and thrones even while hanging on the tree. “Tell it out among the nations that the Lord reigneth from the tree,” may not be an exact translation of the Psalm, but it is true, Psalm or no Psalm.

44. *And it was about the sixth hour,*

About noon, when the sun was at its height.

and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

Three o’clock in the afternoon.

45. *And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.*

As if the great light of heaven and the pattern of heavenly things were both disturbed. The sun puts on mourning, and the temple rends her veil in horror at the awful deed enacted on the cross.

46. *And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.*

Christ’s life being finished, perfected, completed; he yielded up the ghost, willingly dying, laying down his life as he said he would: “I lay down my life for the sheep. I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”

47. *Now when the centurion, saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.*

He was set there at the head of the guard, to watch the execution; and he could not help saying, as he observed the wonderful signs in heaven and earth, "Certainly this was a righteous man."

48. *And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things, which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*

A strange ending to that day, was it not? The three hours' darkness and the death-cry of the Christ had not converted them, but it had convicted them of sin. They felt that a great and heinous crime had been committed; and, though they had come together as to a mere show or sight, they went away from the spectacle impressed as they had never been before: "All the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned."

49. *And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.*

In these doings on Calvary you and I have a share—in their guilt, or else in their merit. Oh, that we may not be condemned with those who were guilty of his death, but may we be cleansed by that precious blood which puts away the sin of all who believe on him!

50-52. *And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just: (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.*

This rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, was Jesus' disciple, "but secretly for fear of the Jews" (John 19:38); yet when his Lord was actually dead, extraordinary courage nerved his spirit, and boldly he went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Joseph and Nicodemus are types of many more who have been emboldened by the cross of Christ to do what, without that mighty magnet, they would never have

attempted. When night comes, the stars appear; so in the night of Christ's death these two bright stars shone forth with blessed radiance. Some flowers bloom only at night: such a blossom was the courage of Joseph and Nicodemus.

53, 54. *And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.*

Our King, even in the grave, must have the best of the best: his body was wrapped in a clean linen cloth, and, laid in Joseph's own new tomb, thus completing the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9. Some see in this linen shroud an allusion to the garments in which priests were to be clothed.

Joseph's was a virgin sepulchre, wherein up to that time no one had been buried, so that, when Jesus rose, none could see, that another came forth from the tomb instead of him.

That rock-hewn cell in the garden sanctified every part of God's acre where saints lie buried. Instead of longing to live till Christ comes, as some do, we might rather pray to have fellowship with Jesus in his death and burial.

55, 56. *And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.*

Can we cling to Christ when his cause seems to be dead and buried When truth is fallen in the streets, or is even buried in the sepulchre of scepticism or superstition, can we still believe in it, and look forward to its resurrection? That is what some of us are doing at the present time. O Lord, keep us faithful!

Luke 24

1. *Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.*

While the Jewish Sabbath lasted, they paid to it due respect. They did not even go to the sepulchre to perform the kindly offices of embalmment; but when the old Sabbath was dying away, and the new and better Sabbath began to dawn, these holy women found their way back to their Lord's tomb. Woman must be first at the sepulchre as she was last at the cross. We may well forget that she was first in the transgression; the honor which Christ put upon her took away that shame. Who but Mary Magdalene should be the first at the tomb? Out of her Christ had cast seven devils, and now she acts as if into her he had sent seven angels. She had received so much grace that she was full of love to her Lord.

They meant to embalm the body; they had brought sweet spices with them for that purpose. It was well that it was in their heart, although it was an unwise and needless project. Yet I doubt not that the Lord thought those spices were very sweet, and that he accepted them because of the love they represented; and, sometimes, you and I, in our ignorance, have tried to do for Christ what he would not wish to have us do, but he has understood our motive, and accepted our intention, albeit that there was a mistake lurking behind it.

2-4. *And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulcher. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments:*

They might have been much more perplexed if they had found the body of Jesus

there, for then his promises would not have been fulfilled, and all their hopes would have been blighted forever. Unbelief is often the mother of needless perplexity. The resurrection of Christ is plain enough to us now; but to those who had seen him die, and whose faith was so very weak, it was a cause for perplexity that they could not find his dead body.

5. *And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?*

The mistake they made was that of seeking for the living Savior where he could not be found. We have all of us made the same mistake. Some of us are making it now. We are seeking good things in the midst of evil; hoping to find satisfaction where it was never yet discovered, and never will be; seeking, but seeking in the wrong place; seeking for the living among the dead.

6-8. *He is not here, but is risen:*

The living Christ might have sat down in the tomb—he might have made the sepulcher his resting place, but it would not have been appropriate; and so he teaches us today that Christians should dwell in places appropriate to them. Ye are risen in Christ, ye ought not to dwell in the grave.

remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. And they remembered his words,

It is well to know Christ's words, even though we often forget them; because we could not remember them if we had not once known them. Even though our leaky memory lets so much run through, there will be enough remaining in the soul to come back with great sweetness, by—and—by, in sometime of special need. Thus, those holy women, who had often ministered to Christ, "remembered his words,"—

9-11. *And returned to the sepulcher, and told all these things unto the*

eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles. And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.

What an emptying power unbelief has! No news could ever be more full of solace than the news of a risen Savior; but to the ears of unbelief this news, which made all heaven glad, seemed to the apostles but as idle tales.

Unbelief tied the hands of Jesus once when he was at Nazareth, for "he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief:" and unbelief seems often to tie our heart-strings too, so that they can give forth no sweet music. O Lord, help us to overcome our unbelief, and enable us ever confidently to believe the truth that comes to us supported by such testimony as these good women gave to the apostles!

12. *Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulcher;*

He must needs go and see for himself, impetuous spirit that he was; so he "ran unto the sepulcher;"—

and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves,

So that he knew that they had not taken away the body of Jesus; for, if they had, they certainly would not have taken off the linen clothes. It would have been very difficult, and would have taken considerable time to unwrap the cold grave-clothes when they were bound to the body by the unguents that had been used.

and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.

Thus that notable day wore on. Christ had risen, but his people had not risen to full belief in him; they were still in the grave of distress and doubt, though their Master had left the grave of death.

13, 14. *And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village*

called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three score furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. As was most proper, they that feared the Lord spake often one to another.

Just as Elijah and Elisha talked with each other as they went towards the Jordan where Elijah was to be translated, so these two disciples were talking together of the great events that had recently happened; and especially talking of the death and the reported resurrection of Christ. This was most natural, for what is uppermost in the heart will soon be uppermost upon the tongue. They had had their minds greatly exercised concerning the departure of their Lord, and it was only natural that they should speak of it. If we never talk of Christ, we have great reason to suspect whether he is really in our hearts at all.

Christ's declaration to his disciples, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," was literally fulfilled in the case of these two disciples going to Emmaus.

15. *And it came to pass that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them.*

When two saints are talking together, Jesus is very likely to come and make the third one in the company. Talk of him, and you will soon talk with him. I would that believers more often spoke the one to the other about the things of God. It has been said that, in the olden time, God's people spake often one to another; and now we have altered that, and God's people speak often one against another. It is an alteration; but it certainly is not an improvement. May we get together again, and, like these two disciples, talk of all the things that happened in Jerusalem eighteen centuries ago! If we have less of reasoning than they had, let us have more of communion.

16. *But their eyes were holden that they should not know him.*

Oh, these eyes of ours! They let us see a great deal that we had better not see; and there are some things, which we might almost die to see, which we see not. I doubt not that, often, spiritual beings are about us, but we do not discern them;

and, certainly, the Master himself ofttimes draws near, yet our eyes are holden, and we do not see him. This may even happen at the communion table; we may see the signs and symbols, but see not Christ, the signified and symbolized One. It is ill when it is so.

17. *And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?*

Christian people, why are you sad? It should not be so. And when you talk, why do you increase each other's sadness? Is that wisdom? Surely, the Master might say to some here present, "Why are ye sad?" I hope that he will enable you to shake off the sadness, and to rejoice in him.

18, 19. *And the one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him, Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:*

What a little advance these disciples had made in the knowledge of Christ! He had been their Teacher, they had seen his miracles, and yet, though they had been constantly under his superintendence, they had not learned enough to know that he was divine. The Holy Ghost had not yet been given; and, without the Holy Spirit's divine instruction, these disciples could only say that Christ "was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people:"

20. *And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him.*

These were sad things to talk about. They thought that they had lost all when they had lost Christ; and yet there is no theme in all the world that is more full of joy than talk about the crucified Christ. This is strange, is it not? If we look beneath the surface, we shall see that the darkest deed that was ever perpetrated has turned out to be the greatest blessing to mankind; and that the cruellest crime

ever committed by mortal man has been made the channel of the divinest benediction of God.

21–23. *But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive.*

How innocently they tell the story! How they convict themselves of stark unbelief! And the Master hears it all patiently and quietly. What a strange sensation it must have been for him to hear them talking about him in this singular way when, all the while, they did not know who the "stranger" was to whom they were speaking! Have you ever thought of what the Savior must think of many things that we say? We think them wise; but they must be very foolish to the eye of his infinite wisdom, and very shallow to him who sees everything to the bottom.

24. *And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulcher, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not.*

They made out a very clear case against their own unbelief here. They had the evidence of the women, and they had the evidence of the men of their own company; the women, they knew were honest. About their own company they could have no doubt, but yet they did not draw the inference which was clear enough, namely, that Jesus had risen, and that what he said he was he had proved himself to be.

25. *Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.*

Supposing him to be a stranger in Jerusalem, yet one who was well acquainted with Jewish prophecy, they had told him exactly what the prophecies had foretold concerning the Messiah. If they had meant to refer to the various

prophecies concerning Christ, they could not have detailed facts which would have more accurately fulfilled them, and therefore Christ said to them “O you foolish men, how slow of heart you are to believe all that the prophets have spoken!”

I am afraid that it may be said of us that we are “slow of heart to believe.” We want so many proofs. We very readily disbelieve, but we very slowly believe. If you had a piano in your house, and you left it for months; and when you came back, you found it all in beautiful tune, you would be sure that somebody must have been there to put it in tune; but if, on the other hand, you left it to itself, and it got out of tune, you would say that such a condition was only what was to be expected. So it is natural for us to get out of tune. Sometimes we ring out glad music on the high sounding cymbals, and we lift up the loud hallelujahs of exultant joy; but soon we are down again in the deeps, and strike a minor key. Grace alone can raise us; nature, alas! sinks if left to itself.

26. *Ought not Christ to have suffered these things—*

“Are not those just the very things which the prophets say that the Christ, the Anointed, must suffer? ‘Ought not Christ to have suffered these things,’”—

And to enter into his glory?

Is not this just what he said he would do?

27. *And all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*

We may well wish that we might have been there. What a privilege it was for those two disciples—a walk and a talk combined! But what heavenly talk, all concerning himself! I know that you, dear friends, never relish a discourse unless Christ is foremost in it; but when Christ is the sole subject, and even Scripture itself is made subordinate to the display of Christ, then are you well content.

28. *And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went:*

Never had they had a shorter walk in their lives; his holy talk had made the journey seem as nothing, and sorry they were to see the village, and especially when they found, that their companion had an idea of going further.

And he made as though he would have gone further.

Christ intended to go further unless the two disciples constrained him to tarry with them. For Christ never forces his company upon anyone; and if we are willing to let him go, he will go, nor will he return until we are heartily sick of having treated him coldly. When we can no longer bear the absence of Christ, then he will speedily return to us.

29–30. *But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them.*

That was the old sign, well known to them and to him—that blessing and breaking of the bread.

31. *And their eyes were opened, and they knew him;*

Sometimes when you do not remember a friend who has greatly changed, or from whom you have been long apart, some old familiar sign will bring it all back as with a rush of memory; you know him at once. Now if this were an ordinary meal, as perhaps it was, Jesus was so in the habit of giving thanks that they knew him by that. I wish we knew every Christian by the same sign. Or if this were, indeed, a celebration of his own sacred festival, then again they knew, for is not this the sign between Christ and his people, and is not this table the place where Jesus meets his beloved? “And their eyes were opened, and they knew him.” But they knew him to see him no more that night.

and he vanished out of their sight.

It is sometimes so with us; we have just recognized our Lord, and, lo! he has

gone.

32-36. *And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures? And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem*

This shows their zeal and also their courage; this news was too good to be kept to themselves, and although it was nearly night, and they had a good distance to go, in a country that was far from safe for travelers, they “returned to Jerusalem,”—

and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. And as they spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them,

You see that, while they were talking about Christ, he came, and stood in their midst. Speak of your Master, and he will appear. Oh, happy people! who have but to talk of Jesus, and lo! he comes to them.

and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

This was the common Jewish salutation; but, henceforth, it would he sanctified most divinely, and it would be a Christian greeting to say, “Peace be unto you.” No more appropriate greeting could have been given to the troubled disciples.

37–40. *But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet.*

They knew those signs, the marks of his crucifixion. They ought to have been convinced at once that it was even he.

41. *And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered*

That is a singular combination. At first, they believed not for grief; and now the pendulum swings the other way, and they believe not for joy. There is a kind of unbelief that is begotten of excessive delight. We know something to be true, and yet there comes the recoil, and the doubt, "Surely it is too good to be true; can it really be so?" See how Jesus convinced them that he was not a spirit: "while they yet believed not for joy,"—

he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?

"Anything to eat?"

42. *And they gave him apiece of a broiled fish,*

Which, as fishermen, they were pretty sure always to have.

and of an honeycomb.

As a second course, to complete the meal.

43. *And he took it, and did eat before them.*

Some of the old versions add, "and gave the rest to them," which I think is very likely to have been the case. It would be all the more convincing to them if he really ate before them, and then that they also partook of the same food of which he had taken part.

44. *And he said unto them, These are the words which I spoke unto on, while I was yet with you, that all things 'must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in time psalms,*

concerning me.

Notice the seals which our Lord continually set upon the Old Testament, the manner in which he always treated the Scripture, the reverent way in which he confessed its infallibility, and his determination that, in every item, every jot and tittle, it should be fulfilled by himself. This was often manifested before his death; and, on his return from the grave, he had not changed his mind. He here speaks of the three great parts into which the Old Testament was divided by the Jews, and he expressly sets the seal of his royal assent upon "the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms."

45. *Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures,*

The author of the sacred volume must himself expound it to the heart and understanding, or we shall be rather blinded by its light than made to see thereby.

46, 47. *And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

This gospel message was to be proclaimed among all nations, "beginning at Jerusalem", but not ending there. It has been preached to us; let us see to it that we pass it on to those who have never heard it yet.

48. *And ye are witnesses of these things.*

We also are called to be "witnesses of these things." May the Lord make us to be faithful and true witnesses, for his name's sake! Amen.

49. *And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.*

The promise of the Father was, as you know, the gift of the Holy Spirit. By this gift our Lord's rising again into glory was celebrated. The Holy Spirit was the heavenly largess of the great King by which he did honor to the return of his Son to his ancient throne. The apostles and the other disciples were to wait for this gift. They might have to wait for some days, but it is better to wait for divine equipment than to go out to holy service in our own strength. All that you do will have to be undone unless it is done in the power of the Holy Ghost.

"But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Has that command ever struck some people who profess to be serving the Lord? Are there not men who preach whom God never sent to preach? The best advice we could give them would be, "Tarry ye." Are there not some who teach, and some who take office in the church, whom God has never endued with gifts or graces for such work? Powerless workers stand in the way of true workers, they block up the path of those whom God sends to serve him.

50. *And he led them out as far as to Bethany,*

The ruling passion was strong in the hour of his departure. Well did he know that place, Bethany—the place of love, where he had received a welcome such as he had experienced nowhere else on earth—where lived Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus—there did he bid "Good-bye" to his disciples.

and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.

He never had lifted up his hands to strike them, or to invoke curses upon them. Those hands were filled with blessings, and the last thing that was seen of Jesus by human eyes was his hands uplifted in the act of blessing.

51, 52. *And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him*

Then they were not Unitarians—"They worshipped him,"—and there were angels present at the time who would have been sure to have rebuked them if it had been a wrong thing for them to worship him. Indeed, they themselves, both as Jews and as Christians, would have felt, in their inmost soul, that they could

not worship anyone but God; but Christ is God, so they did well to worship him.

And returned to Jerusalem with great joy:

Back to the place of his murder—back to the place where they were likely to be themselves murdered.

53. *And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.*

So bold were they that the very central spot for the worship of Jehovah was made the place where Christ's divine sovereignty was proclaimed.

Jesus is risen, so begin to praise him; and, having once begun, keep on praising him, and never leave off so long as there is cause for praising him, and that will be for ever and ever. Jesus has gone up to heaven, and cleared an open way for us right up to the throne of God, so send your praises up to him; let your heart mount from the earth right up to the heart of God.

JOHN

John 1

John is the majestic Evangelist; he is the high-soaring eagle with the piercing eye. His is the Gospel of the Son of God.

1. *In the beginning was the Word.*

The divine Logos, whom we know as the Christ of God. The first words of this gospel remind us of the first words of the Old Testament: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” Even then “the Word” was; he existed before all time, even from everlasting. He is the eternal Son of the eternal Father; he is really what Melchisedec was metaphorically, “having neither beginning of days, nor end of life.”

And the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

I know not how the Deity of Christ can be more plainly declared than in his eternal duration. He is from the beginning. In his glory he was “with God.” In his nature he “was God.”

The Word was as truly God as the Father was God, and as the Spirit was God: “these three are one,” and ever have been one. “Very God of very God” is that Jesus whom we trust, and love, and adore.

2. *The same was in the beginning with God.*

“Ere sin was born, or Satan fell;” ere there was a creation that could fall, “the same was in the beginning with God.”

3. *All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing*

made that was made.

We cannot describe the Deity of Christ in clearer language than John uses. He was with God; he was God; he did the works of God, for he was the Creator. If any doubt his Deity, they must do so in distinct defiance of the language of Holy Scripture.

He that hung upon the cross was the Maker of all worlds. He that came as an infant, for our sake, was the Infinite. How low he stooped! How high he must have been that he could stoop so low!

4, 5. *In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*

It never has done so; it never will. You may sometimes call the darkness the ignorance of men, or the sin of men. If you like, you may call it the wisdom of men, and the righteousness of men, for that is only another form of the same darkness.

The light of Christ shone many times amid the darkness that enshrouded the world before his coming to live here in the flesh, yet comparatively few recognized that light, and rejoiced in it. Christ's light shines more brightly now, but the dark, benighted soul of man perceives not the brightness of our spiritual Lord until the Holy Spirit works the mighty miracle of regeneration, and so gives sight to those who have been blind.

6. *There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.*

How very different is the style of this verse from the one that precedes it! How grand, how sublime, are the Evangelist's words when he speaks of Jesus! How truly human he becomes, how he dips his pen in ordinary ink, when he writes: "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John." Yet that was a noble testimony to the herald of Christ. John the Baptist was "a man sent from God."

7. *The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all*

men through him might believe.

That is our business, too. We who are ministers sent from God bear witness of the Light, that all men through him may believe. Oh, how often we go home, and cry, “Who hath believed our report?” We do not ask you to believe in us; no, but in our Master, whose heralds we are. If we can lead you to faith in him, we shall be glad indeed; but, if not, we will sorrow because we have missed our mark, and failed in our purpose.

8, 9. *He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

There was no light from John except what he reflected from his Lord. All the light comes from Jesus. Every man who comes into the world with any light borrows his light from Christ. There is no other light; there can be no other. He is the “Light of the World.”

If any man has saving light, true light, he gets it through Christ. There is no other light; all other light is but darkness visible. The light in which we see God comes from Jesus.

10. *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.*

This is a sad verse. He was a stranger in his own house. He was unknown amidst his own handiwork. Men whom he had made, made nothing of him. “The world knew him not;” did not recognize him. Strange was it that the Creator came to his own earth, and yet he was unknown. Men mistook him, they hated him, they crucified him whom they ought to have entertained with sacred hospitality, and worshipped with holy loyalty.

11. *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

That favored circle, the Jewish nation, where revelation had been given, even

there, there was no place for him. He must be despised and rejected even by his own nation.

12. *But as many as received him,*

This is a blessed “But.” Though Christ’s own nation, the Jews, as a whole “received him not,” there was “a remnant according to the election of grace,” there were some who received him.

How came those persons to receive him when others rejected him? There must have been some great change wrought in them to make them different from the rest of their countrymen; and truly there was, for these were twice-born men.

to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

All men are not the sons of God; the doctrine of the universal Fatherhood is utterly untrue. They only become the sons of God who receive Christ, and believe on his name; else are they heirs of wrath, even as others.

13. *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

There is another birth beside the natural one; never does the birth of the flesh make us Christians. If our ancestry should be a line of saints yet are we born sinners; we must be born again if we are to become saints. If we could trace our pedigree to a perfect man, if such there be, yet the birth by the flesh would not avail us.

Sons of God are ”born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” To receive Christ, a man must be born of God. It is the simplest thing in all the world, one would think, to open the door of the heart, and let him in; but no man lets Christ into his heart till first God has made him to be born again, born from above.

14. *And the Word was made flesh,*

Here was the incarnation of him who made all things. He that is God "was made flesh."

And dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

They who saw Christ on earth were highly privileged; but it is a spiritual sight of him alone that is to be desired, and we can have that even now. How full of grace, how full of truth, he is to all those who are privileged to behold him!

Oh, all ye who would know Christ, learn that he is worth the knowing! He is full of grace for your sinnership, and full of truth for your ignorance. He can cleanse and he can teach; there is everything in him that you need. You shall not be deceived, for he is full of truth; you shall not be rejected, for he is full of grace.

15, 16. *John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fullness have all we received, and grace for grace.*

Linking our hands with those who have gone before us, and those who are still with us in the faith, we say unitedly, "Of his fullness have all we received." There is never a trace of declining in him. It was fullness when the first sinner came to him; and it is fullness still; it will be fullness to the very end.

"And grace for grace." We get grace to reach out to another grace, each grace becoming a stepping-stone to something higher. I do not believe in our rising on the "stepping-stones of our dead selves." They are poor stones; they all lead downwards. The stepping-stones of the living Christ lead upwards; grace for grace, grace upon grace, till grace is crowned with glory.

17. *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

We know that the law came by Moses. The law has often burdened us, crushed us, convinced us, condemned us. Let us be equally clear that grace and truth

come by this divine channel, “Jesus Christ.”

18. *No man hath seen God at any time;*

He is too high, too spiritual, to be perceived by human senses.

The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

There is no way of knowing God, and being reconciled to God, except as we receive Jesus Christ, his Son, into our hearts, and learn of him, through the Holy Spirit’s teaching, all that he delights to reveal to us concerning his Father.

We do not want to see God apart from Christ. I am perfectly satisfied to see the Eternal Light through his own chosen medium, Christ Jesus. Apart from that medium, the light might blind my eyes. “No man hath seen God at any time.” Who can look on the sun? What mind can look on God?

But Christ does not hide the Father; he manifests him. What of God we need to know, we may see in Christ; enough to save us, enough to sanctify us, enough to make us all like the only-begotten Son of the Father.

19, 20. *And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ.*

“I am not the One anointed of God to save mankind.”

21. *And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias?*

“Art thou Elijah come back to earth?”

And he saith, I am not.

For, though indeed he was the true spiritual Elijah who was to come as the forerunner of the Messiah, yet, in the sense in which they asked the question, the only truthful answer was, “I am not.”

Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.

John gave short, sharp answers to these cavilers. He was not a man of dainty words and polished periods, especially in dealing with such people as they were.

22, 23. *Then said thy unto him, Who art thou? That we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice*

That is all; a voice and nothing more. John did not profess to be the Word; he was only the voice which vocalized that Word, and made it audible to human ears. He came to bear witness to the Christ, but he was not himself the Christ. Humbly he reduces himself to a voice; but he was not “a voice and nothing more.” There was much that was mighty and wise in that voice.

of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Isaiah.

You see, even as a voice, John was not original. That straining after originality, of which we see so much today, finds no warrant among the true servants of God. Even though John is only a voice, yet he is a voice that quotes the Scriptures: “Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.” The more of Scripture we can voice, the better. Our words, what are they? They are but air. His Word, what is it? It is “grace and truth.” May we continually be lending a voice to the great Words of God that have gone before!

24-27. *And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is, who coming after me is preferred before me,*

whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.

See the true humility of this faithful servant of Christ. He does not dream of putting his own name side by side with his Master's. The unloosing of shoe latchets was work for a slave to do, but if we are privileged to perform this work for Christ, it will make us as kings before him. To do anything for Christ, to have even a menial's place in his palace, is better than being an emperor among men. May we have the portion of those who are not ashamed to unloose the latchet of Christ's shoes!

Yet there are times when, if there is a shoe-latchet to be unloosed, we are too proud to stoop to do it. When there is something to be done that will bring no honor to us, we are too high and mighty to do it. O child of God, if you have ever been in that condition, be greatly ashamed of yourself!

John was first in his day, the morning-star of the Light of the gospel, yet even he felt that he was not worthy to do the least thing for Christ. Where shall you and I put ourselves? Paul said that he was "less than the least of all the saints." He ran away with a title that might have been very appropriate for us. Well, we must let him have it, I suppose; and we must try to find another like it; or if we cannot find suitable words, God help us to have the humble feeling, which is better still!

28. *These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.*

Was that the place where the Israelites crossed the Jordan? It is said to have been so; and truly this is the place where we cross the Jordan too—come out of old Judaism into the true faith of the revealed Christ.

29. *The next day*

John lost no time. He had no sooner discovered the Savior than he bore witness of him. "The next day." As soon as ever his eyes lighted upon Jesus, he had his testimony ready for him.

John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of

God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

Now is he bringing out his message; now is he pointing out his Master. John preached a sacrificial Savior, a sin-bearing Savior, a sin-atoning Savior. You and I have nothing else to preach. Let each of us say—

"Tis all my business here below
To cry, Behold the Lamb!"

30. *This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.*

You know, dear friends, that Christ existed from all eternity, so, in very truth, he was before John; you know, too, the glory and the excellency of our Divine Master's person, so that, in another sense, he was and is before John and all other creatures whom he has made.

31-33. *And I knew him not:*

Although John knew the Savior personally, he did not know him officially. He had a token given to him by God, by which he was to know the Messiah; and he did not officially know him till he had that token fulfilled.

But that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bore record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

John would not know of his own judgment. No doubt he was morally certain that Jesus was the Christ. He had been brought up with him; he knew his mother, he had heard of his wondrous birth; John and Jesus must have been often together; but he was not to use his own judgment in this case, but to wait for the sign from

heaven; and until he witnessed it, he did not say a word about it. When he saw the Holy Ghost descend upon him, then he knew that it was even he.

34. *And I saw, and bore record that this is the Son of God.*

Notice how very clear John is. There is no mistaking him. He repeated himself lest there should be any possibility of an error, and he gives the detail of the mode by which he recognised the Savior, in order that all might be persuaded to accept Jesus as in very truth the Messiah and the Son of God, so that we are to preach very plainly—not with enticing words of men's wisdom, but with demonstration of the Spirit and with power. What have we to conceal? Nay, we have everything to reveal and our business is that men should be convinced that Jesus is the Christ, and should come and put their trust in him.

Hear ye, then, the witness of John. The Christ, who came from Nazareth to be baptized of him in Jordan, he on whom the Holy Ghost descended like a dove, "this is the Son of God." This is the sin-bearing Lamb. Oh, that you and I might fulfill John's expectation, for he spoke that we might believe.

Since John's time, many others have borne similar testimony. We also have received him, and rejoice to say that he has baptised us with the Holy Ghost. All that John said of him is true, and much more than John said is also true. He is the Lamb of God, who has taken upon himself the sin of all who believe in him, and therefore he is able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him.

35, 36. *Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked,*

With holy reverence, with loving awe, gazing upon this extraordinary Person "as he walked"—

He saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

There is no objection to preaching the same sermon twice if it be on such a matter as this. "Behold the Lamb of God," he said one day, and the next day he did not vary the phraseology. He had no new metaphor—no new figure—with

which to set forth Christ, but, as striking a nail upon the head and the same nail will help to fasten it, and may do more service than bringing out a new nail, so he gets to the same word and the same subject—"Behold the Lamb of God."

37. *And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.*

It is hard preaching when you preach away your congregation, but John did this deliberately. He wished these two no longer to be his disciples, but to become the disciples of Jesus. He had mastered the meaning of his own words, "He must increase, but I must decrease," and he was quite willing that it should be so: "The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus."

They went beyond their teacher. And oh! what a mercy it is if our hearers can go Christward far beyond us. John was well content to be left behind if they followed Jesus; and so may any minister of Christ rejoice if his people will follow Jesus, even if they go far beyond his attainments.

38, 39. *Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What see ye?*

Christ wants intelligent followers: so he asks the question, "What seek ye?"

They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see,

He gave them a full invitation to come to the place where he tarried, and see for themselves. That is what Jesus still says, "Come and see." If any of you want to know him, "Come and see." You are perfectly welcome to "Come and see" all that Jesus has to show you.

They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

The best part of that day was the portion which they spent with Jesus; it was the best day they had ever enjoyed, for they lived with Jesus. It was also the

beginning of better days for these two disciples; for, having once lived with Jesus, they learnt never to live without him. Oh, that we also may abide with him!

40, 41. *One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.*

Where should missionary work begin? A brother should begin with his brother. It is all very well to have a desire to go to the heathen in Africa; you had better begin work as a missionary in England, and then go to Africa. He who cannot win his brother is not likely to win anybody else.

"He first findeth his own brother Simon:" this Andrew, who was afterwards to bring so many to Christ, must begin at home, and succeed there. If we are not faithful with one or two relatives, how can God trust us with a pulpit and a congregation?

42. *And he brought him to Jesus,*

This is how the kingdom began to grow—by individual effort. "Andrew findeth Simon": one convert must bring another: "and he brought him to Jesus."

And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jonah: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

There was a meaning in the change of names, for there was about to be a change of character—the timid son of a dove soon to become a very rock for the Church. Christ changes men's names, and changes their natures, too. He can make the most fickle of us to become firm and steadfast. Oh, that he would thus work by his grace upon us!

43. *The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth*

Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

"The day following." See, friends, what a wonderful chapter this is. There is a book called, The Book of Days; I call this chapter the chapter of days. Every day seems memorable for some great event.

44. *Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.*

"Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter," was a poor, miserable village; but God greatly honored it. Great works often begin in little places. The best of beings came out of the despised town of Nazareth, and three of the best of men, Philip, Andrew, and Peter, came out of Bethsaida.

45. *Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.*

True faith may make blunders. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, except by reputation, and he was Jesus of Bethlehem quite as much as he was Jesus of Nazareth; but true faith is accepted of God even though it makes some mistakes. It believes God's Word, and it believes God's Son, and therefore it shall be accepted.

46. *And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.*

Christ had said, "Come and see." Now Philip used the same words, "Come and see." It is always right to follow the example that the Lord Jesus has set us.

47. *Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*

"There is no craft or deception in this man, as there was in Jacob; he is a true Israelite, like Israel at his best."

48. *Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me?*

He was conscious that Christ did know him, and being a man who was altogether free from cunning and craftiness, he pointedly asked how Christ came to know him.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

What Nathanael had been doing there, we do not know; probably he had been meditating, or he may have been engaged in prayer. But this announcement was a proof to Nathanael that Jesus could see all things, and read men's hearts, and know what they were doing in their chosen retreats: "When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee." Christ knows all of you who came in here, tonight, in a prayerful spirit, seeking him. And whenever men are seeking him, be you sure that he is also seeking them.

49. *Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.*

"Thou sawest what I was doing in secret; and by that token I perceive that thou art God's own Son."

50. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou! Thou shalt see greater things than these.*

You who are honest in heart, you who can be convinced by a single argument—and, mark you, one good argument is as convincing as twenty good arguments, and a great deal better than a hundred bad ones—you who are willing to be led by a single thread shall be led. If you are willing to believe on what is clear evidence, you shall have more evidence: "thou shalt see greater things than these." God will show much to that man who has eyes with which to see it. He who will not see, and does not wish to see, shall grow more and more blind, and the darkness shall thicken about him.

51. *And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall, see Heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.*

“Thou art a true Israelite, and thou shalt have Israel’s vision. Thou shalt see the same sight as thy father Jacob saw when he fell asleep with a stone for his pillow, only thy vision shall be far grander than his. Christ always knows how to meet the needs of our hearts, and to give us something in accordance with our own expressions, and to make his answers fit our requests, only that he always far exceeds all that we ask or even think, blessed be his holy name!”

John 2

Our Savior had lived on the earth for thirty years, and had worked no miracle. There was the hiding of his power. He had been subject unto his parents, and had lived in obscurity. Now he has broken through the obscurity, and he begins his public ministry by working a miracle.

1. *And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee;*

"The third day." John keeps a kind of diary for Christ. In those first days there was something for every day, and they were a specimen of the whole life of the Savior. He could never say, like Titus, "I have lost a day." Every day had its deed, glorifying to God, and blessed to men. Let us also try to labor for Christ every day; let there be no day without its mark. May God grant that there may be something to make every day memorable!

"And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee." The first miracle of our Lord was not wrought at Jerusalem; but away there in the back settlements, in "Galilee of the Gentiles." It was necessary for him to be seen, and to work miracles which might be seen; but he began in an obscure region, among a despised people.

And the mother of Jesus was there:

This expression leads to the belief that there was some kind of kinship between the bridegroom or the bride and the mother of Jesus, for it is not said that she was invited to be there, but that she "was there."

2. *And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.*

Happy marriage, where Christ is invited to be present! Where Christ goes, his disciples go. If they suffer with him, they also rejoice with him. If he goes to a feast, they must go, too: “Both Jesus was called, and his disciples.” They were only five; but five is a large number to add to a poor family’s wedding party. It shows the generosity of their heart that they invited Jesus to come and bring his disciples; and he went to put honor upon marriage, especially as he foresaw that the day would come when the apostate church of Rome would reckon marriage to be dishonorable, and not permit one who was married to officiate as a minister.

3. *And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.*

I notice that John calls Mary “the mother of Jesus.” I suppose he had in his mind the dying word of Christ, “Behold thy mother!” Such things make a deep impression upon us; and we are apt, when writing, to use the phrases that have been burnt into the memory. “The mother of Jesus.” Because she has been too much exalted in the Romish church, I fear that we run to the other extreme, and think too little of this woman to whom the angel Gabriel said, “Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.”

“They wanted wine.” They had not been long married before there was want in the house. Even in the brightest days of life, they wanted something more; and the mother of Jesus saw that they were in want, and that the marriage festival would be dishonored; so she went to her son and she said, “They have no wine.” I fear she spoke a little like an ordinary mother addressing her son; but the time had come when that discipline was to end. Mary was not his mother as the Son of God. He was about to work a miracle, and he would have her and all his relatives know that he would not use his miraculous powers merely for their advantage; but for the glory of God and the instruction of men.

4. *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee?*

It was a very difficult position for him to be in, to act the part of a loving and obedient son as far as his manhood was concerned, and yet, as the Son of God, by no means to compromise his divine character, but to stand out there as being under no influence of the flesh. Just as we are not to know Christ after the flesh,

so he no longer knew mother, or brother, or friend, according to earthly relationship; and when Mary intruded her motherhood upon him, it was but right and fitting that he should say, “What have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.”

mine hour is not yet come.

The Savior had an hour for everything; an hour for suffering, and an hour for working; and he did everything punctually, promptly to the minute. That was one of the beauties of his life: “Mine hour is not yet come.” Perhaps he meant, “My hour to work this miracle is not yet come;” and he would not be hurried by anybody. Beloved, it is not easy to be familiar with Christ, as I trust we are, and yet always to maintain humble deference to his sacred will. Never let us pray as if we were dictators, or his equals. We must keep our place, however near we come to the dear bosom of our Lord. He is still in heaven, and we are upon earth. He is the Master, we are the servants; and if we are as favored as his mother was, we must not go too far, as she did.

5. *His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.*

This holy woman took the rebuke in silence. She said nothing; she felt the force of Christ’s words, she proved that she did by now fully believing that he would do something or other. Had he not said, “Mine hour is not yet come”? Did not that mean that the hour would come, and that he would do something by-and-by? So she quietly accepted his reproof. Oh, you who are in great trouble, you feel as if you could force the hand of Christ; but you must not think of doing that. Even if you could have power over him, you would be very foolish to use it. Let him alone; he knows best how and when to show his grace towards you. Keep silence before him, and in patience commit your way unto him.

6. *And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.*

I admire the accuracy of the Holy Spirit. John does not know exactly know much these vessels held; they were not made to measure things in, so he writes,

“containing two or three firkins apiece.” Let us always speak correctly; sometimes, “almost” or “thereabouts” will be words that will just save our truthfulness. Let us not speak positively when we do not know; and when the accuracy of a statement is necessary, and we cannot give it in terms that are definite, let us give it in words like these, “containing two or three firkins apiece.” These were great “waterpots of stone.” Stone will not, as a rule, hold the flavour of anything that has been in it, like an earthen vessel would do; so these pots, which had contained nothing else but water, could not be suspected of having any lees of wine concealed therein, or any flavouring material that would make the water taste like wine. No, they were genuine stone waterpots.

7. *Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.*

There was no fear of anything but water being there: “They filled them up to the brim.” They obeyed Christ to the letter. If Christ says to you, “Fill the waterpots with water, fill them up to the brim. Never cut down his commandments; carry them out as far as the largest interpretation can go. When you are bidden to believe in him, believe in him up to the brim. When you are told to love him, love him up to the brim. When you are commanded to serve him, serve him up to the brim.

8. *And be saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it.*

“Draw out now.” “Now.” He had not turned the water into wine by any incantation. He simply willed it, and it was done. He said, “Draw out now.” He did not want to leave it unnoticed, because he had not worked a miracle before, and he could not say whether this was one. He was sure it was; so he said to the servants, when they had filled the waterpots with water, “Draw out now. Do not bring it to me for me to taste it; I know what it is. Take it to the chairman of the festival, to him who sits at the head of the table, and is the judge of the wine:” “and they bare it.” The holy confidence of Christ is admirable. May we be able, by faith, so to work, with a calm consciousness of divine help!

But notice this. Whenever the Lord fills any of you with a blessing, think that you hear him say, “Draw out now.” He does not fill these pots that they may

keep full. “Draw out now.” Did you have a good time last Monday night at the prayer-meeting? Some of us had. “Draw out now.” Have you lived near to God of late, and are you very happy? “Draw out now.” If he has filled you up to the brim, draw out now; for, if you try to store it up, it will become useless. Selfishness will poison it all.

9. *When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,*

There was no collusion, for the governor, who tasted it, did not know where it came from; and the servants, who knew where it came from, did not taste it, so that they did not know what it was like. If anybody objects to the Savior making wine, I think that the best reply is that all the wine which is made of water will do nobody any hurt, and the more of it the better; and this was so made, certainly. They say that there is a devil in every grape. There were no grapes here; and I am afraid that there is not much of them in most of the wine that is made nowadays; there is something worse than devil in that.

10. *And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.*

That the governor of the feast did not understand, but he admired it and here is a picture of what our Lord always does. He gives his people the best last. At first, the wine of the kingdom is mingled with much bitterness, salt tears of sorrow flow into it, but it improves as we go on; and when we shall drink it with him, in the kingdom of God, what will it be like? The joy of Christ’s love on earth is heaven, but when we get to heaven, and drink it fresh from the everlasting spring, what will that joy be? Oh, the blessedness laid up for the people of God! We pluck some of the fruit from the trees, and eat it; but the fruits laid up in the fruit-chamber, to get ripe by-and-by, are the very pick of the fruit of the tree of life. You who live for the world have had your best already; but, as for our feast with Christ, we go from good to better, and from better to the best.

11. *This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and*

manifested forth his glory;

Moses turned water into blood; Christ turned water into wine. One brought a curse upon the common things of daily life; the other put an added sweetness and blessing into them.

And his disciples believed on him.

They did believe on him before; but now they had ocular demonstration of his divine power and Godhead; and they believed as they had not believed before. May you and I often make distinct progress in faith, so that it may be said of us also, “His disciples believed on him”!

12-17. *After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days. And the Jews’ passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers’ money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.*

This is not usually called a miracle, but I think it should be reckoned as one that Christ, with a scourge of small cords, should be able to drive out the many men who were sitting there, selling doves and changing shekels; for, if they had banded themselves together, they might easily have overcome one person armed only with a little scourge; but the Lord Jesus, by the majesty of his person, completely overawed them all. He overturned the tables of the money-changers, and said to those that sold doves, “Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house a house of merchandise.”

Is there anything in this miracle that can comfort anybody here? Dear friend, you

who are consecrated to God, you who are God's temple, and who rejoice to know that it is so, you desire that your whole being should be the house of God, and used only for his glory; but, somehow or other, evil thoughts have entered into your mind, and you cannot get them out.

Constitutional temptations, old habits, your daily surroundings—all these, are like the money-changers in the temple; or like those that seem not only to sell doves, but to sell dragons and owls. Well, now, you wish you could get rid of these unwelcome invaders. Do you not see what comfort there is for you in our text? "This man doeth many miracles;" then, ask him to come and drive out these evil thoughts, these atheistic doubts, these critical sophistries which lead you almost into infidelity, for he can cast them all out. "Oh!" say you, "I have struggled against them for years, and I cannot get rid of them; if they were once all banished from me, it would indeed be a miracle." Well, "this man doeth many miracles," and he can give you such calm and peace of mind, and such certainty of holy faith, that your nature, shall become like a purged temple, wherein is heard nothing but the song of holy praise, and the voice of them that say, from morning until evening.

18-22. *Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple,*

That is to say, "Ye will destroy it, and ye may destroy it."

and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

He meant that his body, after being destroyed, would be raised up again on the third day. He also said, concerning his life, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." No mere man going to his grave could say, "I have power to take my life again." The departure of life leaves the man necessarily

powerless: he cannot restore himself to life. Behold the sacred body of Jesus, embalmed in spices, and wrapped about with linen; it is laid within the sealed and guarded tomb; how can it come forth to life? Yet Jesus said, “I have power to take my life again”; and he proved it true.

Strange power! That spirit of his, which had traveled through the underlands, and upwards to the eternal glory, had power to return, and to re-enter that holy thing which had been born of the virgin, and to revivify that flesh which could not see corruption. Behold the dead and buried One makes himself to live! Herein is a marvellous thing. He was master over death, even when death seemed to have mastered him: he entered the grave as a captive, but left it as a conqueror. He was compassed by the bonds of death, but he could not be holden of them; even in his cerements he came to life; from those wrappings he unbound himself; from the close-fastened tomb he stepped into liberty. If, in the extremity of his weakness, he had the power to rise out of the sepulcher, and come forth in newness of life, what can he not now accomplish?

23-25. *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.*

All classes have their portion from his mouth. The Herodians come to him, does he for a moment yield to them, or when the opposite party tempt, does he side with them? Does he either side with the Sadducee or with the Pharisee? No, Christ’s course was ever an independent one; he committed himself unto no man, for he knew what was in man. The whole of his life through, you cannot mistake him for a Pharisee, or a Sadducee, or any one of the other teachers. He stands out like a lone mount of light, separate and apart from the chain of dark mountains; and so must the Christian. Christ was separate; and so must you be. Christ was pure, holy, truthful; so must you be. I pray you either renounce your profession, or else seek grace to carry it out.

Our Savior was full of love, and that love made him frank and open-hearted; no frigid reserve kept him at a distance from the people, or shrouded him in a cloud of mystery, he was a man among men, transparent, childlike, “the holy child

Jesus”; but for all that he was ever prudent, and “committed himself unto no man, for he knew what was in man.” Too many who aspire to be leaders of the people study policy, craft, and diplomacy, and think it needful to use language as much for the concealment as for the declaration of their thoughts; such men watch their own words till their very soul seems withered within them. The Friend of sinners had not a fraction of that thing about him, and yet he was wiser and more prudent than if diplomacy had been his study from his youth up.

John 3

This is a very wonderful chapter, because, while it teaches the doctrine of regeneration, and the necessity of a great moral and spiritual change, it yet also reveals the doctrine of salvation by faith alone—a very wonderful combination, which puzzles many who read what is here recorded. Many have been staggered by one or other of these great truths, yet they evidently agree together, for they are taught by the same unerring Teacher, and they are preserved to us by the Spirit of God in the same chapter.

1. *There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:*

We do not know the names of many other Pharisees, but we do know the name of this one because God had loved him with an everlasting love, and therefore with lovingkindness did he draw him to the Savior's feet.

2. *The same came to Jesus by night,*

In all probability, Nicodemus did not wish to commit himself by coming to Christ by day. He had not yet tried and tested him, so he would not be thought to be Christ's follower till he had first had a quiet private talk with him. As a ruler of the Jews, he was wise in acting thus discreetly.

It does not matter if any of you also come to Christ by night if you like. Our Savior has a night-bell to his door, and he is quite willing to be the Physician of your soul, even if you ring him up at midnight.

And said unto him,

When enquirers come to see any of you who are Christians, do not begin talking to them, but let them begin by telling you what they have to say, for it will probably guide you as to what you shall say to them in return. Our Lord Jesus could read all hearts, and he needed no one to tell him what was there, yet, for our sakes, he sets the example of letting Nicodemus speak first.

Rabbi,

He begins very respectfully, and so far, so good; but then, Judas said, "Hail, Master," and kissed Christ, when he went to Gethsemane to betray him.

We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

He admitted the truth as far as he could see it. The miracles of Christ proved him to be a divinely-commissioned teacher. Always be willing to go as far as you can go in the pursuit of truth. If you cannot see everything at once, see all that you can see. Be not of a cavilling spirit; be frank and teachable as this man was.

3. *Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee,*

Christ's formula, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee," was a new style of speech for the Pharisees to hear, for they quoted Rabbi this, and Rabbi that; but Jesus gives himself as his own sufficient authority, with an egoism which cannot be blamed, and which no true disciple of his ever questions, for Christ is himself the truth, and whatever he says is to be humbly received by all his followers.

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

He has no notion of what it really is; he cannot even see it, for he is blind to it until he is born again. It is for this reason that our most lucid explanations of the gospel are altogether lost upon unregenerate men and women. However bright a light God may make our ministry to be, bright light is of no use to blind men, and they must be born again before they can even see the kingdom of God.

4. *Nicodemus saith unto him, how can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?*

His religion was external, you see; he could not grasp the spiritual idea which Christ had set before him. This matter of the new birth is very simple to all of us who know what Jesus meant, but it was exceedingly difficult to Nicodemus; as it has been to all but those who have experienced it.

His questions proved that he could not see the kingdom of God. He blundered over the letter of Christ's message; he misunderstood the metaphor that Christ used; but did Jesus therefore not give Nicodemus any further instruction? Oh, no; listen—

5. *Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

At first Jesus said that a man could not see the kingdom of God except he was born again; now he tells Nicodemus that a man cannot enter the kingdom except he is born of water and of the Spirit.

If the "water" mentioned here relates to baptism—which I greatly question—then, certainly, it shows the way of entrance for a believer, publicly, into the kingdom of God. But if it relates to the purifying power of the Spirit of God—as I believe it does—then it teaches us that no man enters into the kingdom of God, and becomes a partaker of its privileges—which is something more than merely seeing it—except the Spirit of God shall be to him as water purifying him from sin. This is the reason why a man cannot enter into the spiritual kingdom until he is born again, born from above.

6. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.*

There must be, then, a Spirit-birth, or else you belong not to the spiritual realm; and you cannot see and you cannot enter the spiritual kingdom.

A man may have the best parents that ever lived, but all that is born of the flesh is flesh, at the very best. Your father may be a saint, and your mother a saint, but thou art born in sin, for that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and unless thou be born of the Spirit, thou canst not understand or see spiritual things, and thou canst not enter into the spiritual kingdom, for thou hast no spiritual capacity. "The carnal mind discerneth not the things that are of God, for they are spiritual, and must be spiritually discerned." Therefore we must be born again so as to receive that Spirit by which spiritual things are discerned and entered into.

7. *Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.*

This ruler of the Jews was full of astonishment at this strange doctrine, so Christ said to him, "Marvel not."

8. *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof,*

The sound of the wind blowing through the trees—

But canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth:

Where it begins, whither it goes, or where it comes to an end, you cannot tell.

So is every one that is born of the Spirit.

He undergoes a mysterious change, he becomes a new man, he enters into a new life which others cannot comprehend; though they hear the sound of it, they cannot tell whence this man's new life comes, or whither it goes. He has become a spiritual person, not comprehended of natural men.

The Holy Spirit is mysterious, like the wind, and so is the creature that is "born of the Spirit." The spiritual man often cannot understand himself, he is so mysterious a being;—how then shall he be able fully to comprehend how that wondrous new life is created within him? All we know is that he is a new creation, as much the work of eternal power as our first creation.

9. *Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?*

He was puzzled and perplexed, like a man in a maze; the Savior had given him something to think of; and I wish that, when we preach to a congregation, or when we talk to individuals, we would not aim at dazzling them with our fine phrases, but would seek to set the truth before their minds, that it might lie there, to be studied, and thought of, and to be like seed which, in after days, would germinate, and bring forth a harvest to God's praise and glory.

Our Savior is an example to all of us who preach; and, in this instance, he shows us the wisdom of not keeping back the mysteries of the kingdom. I am greatly afraid that many preachers would have begun by talking to Nicodemus of some point that was common to both Judaism and Christianity, and that they would have gone on to apologize for the peculiar mysteries of Christianity, all of which would have been waste of breath, and worse than that. Do not so, my brethren; but speak out the truth boldly, and leave the Eternal Spirit to make use of it as he pleases.

10. *Jesus answered and said, unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?*

"Dost thou profess to teach others, and hast thou never been taught this first great spiritual truth?" Nicodemus was not the last Rabbi who did not understand what it is to be born again, and it is greatly to be feared that there are still many, who are teachers of others, who yet have never experienced this all-important change. The Lord have mercy upon them!

11. *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.*

The testimony of Christ, and of his apostles, and of all true disciples of Christ is this—that there is such a thing as a new birth. Men may not believe that it is true; but, for all that, it is as certain as any other fact in the history of the world. It is foolish for any to deny it because they have not experienced it themselves. Although they have not experienced it, others have, and those who declare that they have been born again are as honest, as reasonable, and as trustworthy as any

other people in the world. If any counsel had to prove his case, in a court of law, by the mouth of five or six witnesses, I am sure that he would not want better witnesses than those who declare that they have been born again. Many of them are well-known people of high repute, and their testimony ought to be believed. But it is not a question of six, or a dozen, or a dozen thousand witnesses. There have been hundreds of thousands of men and women who have borne witness that a miraculous charge has taken place in them, by which they have been born into a new world, and have received a new life, and the testimony of these witnesses ought to be believed. It was hard that Christ should have to say, "Ye receive not our witness."

12. *If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?*

The Savior as good as told Nicodemus that he did not come to argue or to reason with him, but to bear witness to absolute certainties, of which he himself was absolutely sure. So he said to him, "If you do not receive our witness concerning these things, which lie on the very threshold of the kingdom,"—yet, mark you, he had been speaking about regeneration, the great mystery of the new birth—"it is of no use going on to still higher themes." So it is evident that the kingdom of Christ requires great faith—faith on the very threshold of it—to believe the wondrous mystery of the new birth, and still greater faith as deeper truths, the more heavenly things of the kingdom are revealed to us.

13. *And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even, the Son of man which is in heaven.*

It is Christ who knows everything. He understands all mysteries; he can teach all truth, for he has been in heaven, he came down to earth, and he has gone back again to heaven.

Now Nicodemus must have been indeed puzzled. Here was a man who had come down from heaven, yet who had gone up to heaven, and was still there, although he was at that moment talking to Nicodemus! Without the Spirit of God to explain the mystery, he could not make top or bottom of it.

Now observe that, as the first part of this chapter sets forth the need of a great

and supernatural change, the latter part of the chapter shows us the door of mercy wide open, and tells us that faith in Christ will save us.

14, 15. *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life.*

You must be born into a new life if you are to be saved; how are you to have that great blessing? There is life for a look at Jesus Christ lifted up upon the cross, and lifted up in the preaching of the gospel. Look to him, then; and, as surely as those who were bitten by the serpents in the wilderness were healed the moment that they looked at the serpent of brass, so surely shall every son or daughter of Adam, who gives a faith-look at the crucified Savior, be saved at once and for ever.

16. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

That love of God is a very wonderful thing, especially when we see it set upon a lost, ruined, guilty world. What was there in the world that God should love it? There was nothing lovable in it. No fragrant flower grew in that arid desert. Enmity to him, hatred to his truth, disregard of his law, rebellion against his commandments; those were the thorns and briars which covered the waste land; but no desirable thing blossomed there. Yet, “God loved the world,” says the text; “so” loved it, that even the writer of the book of John could not tell us how much; but so greatly, so divinely, did he love it that he gave his Son, his only Son, to redeem the world from perishing, and to gather out of it a people to his praise.

17. *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn, the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

There was no necessity for Christ to come here to condemn us, for we were condemned already by our sin. Why, then, did Jesus come? He must have come

upon an errand of mercy, to bring salvation to the lost. It is even so; God sent him for that very purpose, that he might give eternal life to as many as believe on him. Oh, the glorious freeness of this precious gospel! Surely they deserve the deepest hell who will not have heaven upon such terms. They must for ever perish if they reject life when it is set before them in this truly gracious manner.

18. *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth, not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*

Unbelieving is the condemning sin; it seals upon us the condemnation of every other sin. If thou dost not believe in Christ, thou art not in a state of probation, thou art condemned already; he that believes on him is not in a state of probation, he is not condemned, he is already acquitted, he is at this moment free from condemnation before the judgment-seat of God.

19. *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*

The dislike of Christ is caused by a love of sin. If men did not hug their sins, they would embrace the Savior.

20. *For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.*

This is the secret of infidelity. This is the reason of all opposition to Christ. It is love of sin. Trace it home to its den and lair, and you shall find that it is love of sin that breeds hatred of Christ. Men do not see because they do not want to see. They do not want to see too much lest they should be uneasy in their present state of life. So they kick against Christ, and try to put out the light of his gospel, least they be reproved by it.

21. *But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.*

Those who love their sins cannot at the same time love the Savior; they must love the one, and hate the other; and it is a terrible choice when they deliberately reject the only Savior; “the Light of the world,” and choose the darkness of sin, the darkness of woe, the outer darkness, where there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

22–24. *After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison.*

So he was busy until he was cast into prison. He would not waste an hour while he had an opportunity of doing good; he did it with all his heart.

We ought to be thankful that God’s ministers are not silenced in this age. May the Lord raise up, in these evil days, many a John the Baptist, who shall faithfully declare his testimony concerning the Lamb of God!

25. *Then there arose a question between some of John’s disciples and the Jews about purifying.*

Is it not a come-down—from reading about looking to Christ and loving, to a contention about purifying? There always are in the Church more or leas idle quarrels about the dress of the preacher, about the mode of administering sacraments, and so on—a discussion about purifying.

26. *And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.*

“They are leaving you.” They felt an envy on behalf of John, because his influence appeared to be declining. John was quite a stranger to this feeling; he loved to see his Master grow, even at the cost of his own effacing.

27. *John answered and said, And man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven.*

No spiritual power, no power to bless his fellow-men, except it come from God. Shall I quarrel with God, therefore, if he gives to this man more power than he gives to me? Shall I dispute about it? It is God's sovereign will, and he does as he pleases.

28, 29. *Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, on that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.*

They were vexed, but John was joyful; he loved to hear of Jesus prospering. "I have introduced the Bridegroom; and, henceforth, it will be my part gradually to disappear from the scene."

30. *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

So he did. This is John's one song, last of his utterances almost. He preaches no more sermons that are recorded; he must now go to prison, and there lie in a silence which he could scarcely bear. It was very hard for John to be quiet; he had an active, noble mind, and he became the victim, we fear, of doubts when he was shut up in prison. The breezy air of the wilderness suited him much better than the dull, heavy atmosphere of a prison.

I daresay some of you may feel this at this time; do not set it down to spiritual results, to spiritual causes; set it down to the atmosphere, for so it is. We feel dull and heavy often, but heaviest when the heart is in a heavy air; every wind that rises blows away despair. So we must not think too much of our feelings, which even the wind can change.

31. *He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is*

above all.

However good a man may be, he is earthly; there is flesh and blood about him, akin to the earth; and even if he handles heavenly things, the earthiness of the preacher peeps out every now and then. Christ had nothing of that about him; he was above all.

32. *And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony.*

Sad note! The news that all men went to Christ pleased John, but the fact that none received his testimony, comparatively none, grieved his heart.

33, 34. *He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God has sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.*

There is an infinite spiritual power about the words of Christ; they are the words of God, and the Holy Spirit concentrates all his energy in those words. Did not the Holy Spirit descend, and remain upon him, and that without measure or limit?

35, 36. *The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life:*

He has it now; and he can never lose it, or else it would not be everlasting. He has a life that must exist for ever and ever.

and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life;

He shall not even know what spiritual life is, he shall not be able to understand it, or to form any idea of it. While he is an unbeliever, he is blind to spiritual things.

but the wrath of God abideth on him.

So John's last words are thunder; his dying speech has in it the word most terrible to all of you who believe not in Christ, "The wrath of God abideth on him."

John 4

1–3. *When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John, (though Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples,) he left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee.*

Our Lord knew that the Pharisees would assail him now that he was prospering, and gathering disciples. He, therefore, went away from them; as he did on other occasions. Whenever the cause of God grows, Satan is sure to be violent against it.

Besides, one woman of Samaria, whom he was going to save, was worth more to him than ten thousand Pharisees who would not be saved by him. Most of the learning and culture of Palestine was possessed by the Pharisees, but Christ thought nothing of it in comparison with the soul of the one poor woman of Samaria whom he was going to save.

Observe here that our Lord at first shunned conflict with the Pharisees. When he knew that they were jealous of him, he went away from Judaea to a more remote district, “into Galilee.” May he help us always to take that which may be the wiser course in every emergency! He was not guilty of cowardice; that, he could not be, for he was the bravest of the brave; and sometimes it will be most courageous on our part to shun a conflict. When you believe it is right to do so, never mind what anybody may say; but do as your Master did on this occasion.

4. *And he must needs go through Samaria.*

It is true that it was the nearest way, yet he might have gone round about; but he would not do so, for there were souls in Samaria who were to be blessed by his presence. He had a constraint upon him, an inward impulse, so that “He must

needs go through Samaria." Dear friends, whenever you feel the drawings of the Spirit in any particular direction do not resist them, but yield yourself entirely to his gracious influence, even as your Lord did.

5. *Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.*

You remember how the patriarch said to his favourite son, "Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." This was "the parcel of ground" which was near to Sychar.

6. *Now Jacob's well was there.*

Holy men often impart an interest to the very place which they inhabit. We should not have cared anything about Sychar, or its well, if Jacob had not been there. Where godly men have been, the ground is sacred. How much more so where the God of men comes to visit us!

Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well:

Only half a day spent on his journey, yet he is weary. See, brethren, how he was compassed with infirmity. Our Great High Priest so truly took our flesh, that he was wearied with his journey. He that rolls the stars along was weary in the middle of the day. So weary was he that he sat in the very attitude of weariness, as best he could, on the curb of the well.

Do not be surprised, dear brethren, if you sometimes grow weary in the Lord's work. I trust that, even then, you will not be weary of it, but that you will believe that pour blessed Master can still use even his tired servants, and bless their labors. The Lord Jesus Christ wrought great marvels even when he sat wearily on the brink of Jacob's well; and you, perhaps, are at this moment as fatigued and worn as you well can be; yet, will you not awaken all the energies of your soul if you should see an opportunity of doing good, even if it should be to some poor fallen woman, as in the case here mentioned? It is a blessed thing never to be too tired to pray, and never to be too tired to speak to an anxious enquirer.

and it was about the sixth hour.

About twelve o'clock, in the middle of the day, at high noon. You will observe that our Lord spoke to Nicodemus at night, but when he was about to talk to a fallen woman alone, he did it in the middle of the day. There is a time for everything; so let those who serve God be careful as to the best time of their service. Our Lord had a tender delicacy about him which led him instinctively to do the right thing at the right time.

7. *There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water:*

Was that the time when the women usually came to draw water? No; but it was the time when a woman, who was shunned by other women, would be most likely to come; and the Savior knew that. She had to take odd times to get to the well, for her neighbors did not care to be seen in the company of such a reprobate as she was, and she was probably just as anxious to avoid them.

Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.

This was quite a natural way of beginning a conversation; and they will best touch other people's minds and hearts who do not harshly interject religion, but who wisely introduce it, leading up to it with a holy dexterity such as our Lord always exhibited. He begins, not with any remarks about the woman's life, or her sin, or even about his great salvation, but with the simple request, "Give me to drink."

8. *(For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)*

This was quite a right thing for the disciples to do, for meat must be bought for men to eat. No doubt it is better to pray than to eat; but if one never ate, he would not long be able to pray. I have heard these disciples condemned for their worldliness and carnality, but I fail to see anything of the kind, it does seem to me necessary that somebody should go into the city to buy meat, and although it is not the noblest kind of work, yet, being necessary, it may be the stepping-stone to higher service.

It was a great mercy that the disciples were out of the way just then; had they been there, they might have tried to keep this poor woman from speaking to the Savior; and, sometimes, brethren, it may be well for us to be laid aside. God may do more good without our presence than with it; who can tell?

9. *Then, saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.*

But our Lord did not come to maintain these distinctions of race and caste. It is altogether foreign to the spirit of Christianity for nationalities to be despised. We sometimes hear people say of a person, "Oh, he is only So-and-so!" mentioning some nation that happens to be in the background.

Christ was cosmopolitan, he loved men of every nation, and tribe, and tongue, and people. To him, there was neither Jew nor Samaritan; all such distinctions were banished from his mind. The woman might well say what she did, but her words would have sounded strangely out of place from the lips of Christ.

The woman seemed to say to the Savior, "You Jews will not own us until you want something from us. Now that you happen to be thirsty, you do not mind asking for drink from me; but, at other times, you will have no dealings with us." This was a tart reply to our Lord's request, but he did not answer the woman in the tone she had adopted. When you are dealing with a soul, you must not lose your temper because of a sharp word, a hard saying, or even a blasphemous reply. Soul winners must be very tender and gentle; God make us so!

10. *Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.*

See the deadly mischief of ignorance concerning spiritual things. If she had known, she would have asked, and Christ would have given; but the first link was missing; and, hence, the rest of the chain was not drawn on. Sometimes, all that people need is a little wise instruction, and they will then trust the Savior; God grant that we may ever be ready to give it!

There are two things worth knowing—what grace is, and who it is that gives it. Want of this knowledge often leads to lack of prayer, and lack of prayer leads to lack of receiving. Perhaps someone asks, “Why does not God give without prayer?” Because it is not his will to do so. His will is that we should pray about everything.

11. *The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?*

Christ told the woman that he could give her living water, but it puzzled her to know how he could get at it. The well where they had met was deep, and he had nothing to draw the water out of it; how, then, could he go deeper still to get the living water of which he had spoken? She could not understand his simile, and to this day it is the same with many of our hearers. The simplest language of God’s ministers goes right over the heads of the people; they take our words literally, when they ought to see that they are spiritual, and, on the other hand, I have known them spirit them sway when they ought to be accepted literally. Such is the perversity of man’s mind that, often, he will not understand the truth.

12. *Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?*

Ah, she did not know how infinitely superior Jesus was to Jacob! There could be no comparison between the two. Jesus is the true Father of all Israel, and in that respect he is like to Jacob; but he is immeasurably greater than “father Jacob.”

She took the Savior’s figure literally; and there are still many who cannot see the spiritual meaning of God’s Word, and run their heads against the hard stern letter which killeth, instead of seeking and finding the inner living spirit which giveth life. These are the people who build their hopes of salvation upon outward ordinances, and who impute saving power to “sacraments.” Would God that they knew better!

13, 14. *Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that shall give him*

shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

These words set forth the wonderful nature of divine grace. They certainly greatly err who suppose that we can ever receive it, and yet, after all, be left to perish without it. Nay; but when it is once imparted to us, it continues to spring up within us, like a well that never runs dry. It is the living and incorruptible seed, "which liveth and abideth for ever." It is of the very nature and essence of the grace of God that it is indestructible, it cannot be taken away from the heart in which it has been implanted by the Holy Spirit.

15. *The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.*

The woman had not even the faintest idea of the spiritual truth of which Christ had spoken to her. The fact is, conviction must come before conversion. No sinner is made alive till he is first killed. You cannot clothe him till he is naked. So now the Savior began that conviction work in this woman; and he did it very wisely. He did not at first charge her with criminality, but he led her to accuse herself.

16, 17. *Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband.*

And, as she said it, no doubt she tried to look as innocent as possible; but a guilty flush stole over her face despite her attempt to keep it back.

The Lord Jesus knew all about her character, and here he touched the weakest point in it. His plainest teaching had so far missed the mark, for he had not reached her conscience; but he was about to do so.

Jesus said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband:

Always give people credit for what is well said. If you want to win them, you must mind that you are not rough with them, but admit what you can of the truth in their utterance: "Thou hast well said, I have no husband."

18. *For thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly.*

You can imagine her astonishment—her blank amazement as the secret story of her life was thus repeated to her.

It was needful to arouse this woman to a sense of her sinfulness. It was no use putting on plasters where there was no knowledge of a sore, and no use attempting to fill the void where there was no feeling of emptiness. So first she must be brought low, she must be made to see herself in the glass of truth, and then she would begin to understand her need of salvation.

Oftentimes, in seeking to bless people, the kindest way is not to build them up, but to pull them down; not to begin to encourage their hopes, but to let them see how hopeless their case is apart from sovereign grace.

19. *The woman saith unto him, Sir,*

She is getting more respectful now. When conscience begins to work, men treat the ministry with greater deference.

I perceive that thou art a prophet.

It would have been better if she had perceived that she was a sinner. Perhaps she did perceive it, but scarcely liked yet to confess it openly, so she said, “I perceive that thou art a prophet.”

Now she has a religious difficulty; and what man or woman is there in the world, however far gone from morality, who has not some religious difficulties? And the more immoral they become, the more difficulties they are pretty sure to have. I hate that style of preaching which is everlastingly pandering to difficulties which never would exist except in a dissolute generation like the present. We preach a plain gospel; and when men’s hearts are right, it is all plain to them. To him who desires to understand, difficulties soon cease to be a trouble. We had better deal with men’s hearts and lives than try to answer their quibbling questions. This was the woman’s dilemma,—

20. *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain;*

—This Mount Gerizim—

And ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.

"There are so many sects, can you tell me which is the right one?" That is the question which men often put to us when we begin to touch their consciences.

21. *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.*

"There shall be an abolition of all specially-holy shrines, for all places shall be alike holy. There shall be a putting an end to all your traditions, and your forms of worship, for God shall be worshipped after another fashion than that which is merely formal and superficial."

22. *Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews.*

They have the oracles of God. The Savior comes of the Jews. They are right as far as they follow the instruction they have received; and you Samaritans are wrong in keeping to the law of Moses alone, and rejecting the rest of the Scriptures.

23. *But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.*

You see, all the difficulties that arise are but temporary. Put them away, and get to the great spiritual business that concerns us all, the seeking truly after God in spirit and in truth. If you really want to find God, you shall find him. He is

already seeking you, and your very desire after him is the proof that he has already had dealings with you by his Spirit. Therefore, come unto him, and come at once, “for the Father seeketh such to worship him.”

It is not the place which makes the true worship; it is the heart. It is not even the day; it is the state of a man’s mind. It is not that the place is said to be holy, and therefore prayer is accepted; every place is equally holy where holy men worship God. All distinctions of buildings are heathenish; or, at the best, Jewish; they are done away with by Christ.

24. *God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

Let us never forget this. Even if we all believe it, we do not always act according to that belief. For instance, we sing through a hymn, but it might almost as well be an old song, for our hearts do not go with the words; or while our heads are bowed in prayer, mayhap our thoughts are back with our children, or our shops, or far away in some foreign land. Yet there is no benefit in coming up to a place of worship, or in listening to sermons and prayers, or joining in the singing of sacred songs unless our heart is there. Let us always recollect this, and sigh and cry rather than rejoice if we have been up to the holy assembly, and yet have not worshipped God “in spirit and in truth.”

25, 26. *The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he.*

And she believed it, for what she had heard had prepared her mind for this declaration. Christ’s reading of her heart had convinced her that he was the Messiah. How many have been brought to Christ’s feet by having their characters laid bare in the preaching of the Word! The very thing they did in secret, ay, the very thought of their heart which they never communicated even to their best-beloved friend, has been told them. Their dream has been revealed to them, and the interpretation of it, too; and they have been convinced that he who can thus read their hearts must be the Son of God.'

27. *And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman:*

These men who had themselves been picked off the dunghill marveled that Christ spoke to this woman! So have I known some, who were themselves grievous sinners once, yet they have become horribly conceited some years after conversion, and they have thought that other great sinners might not be saved as they were. God deliver from such abominable pride any soul that professes to be saved! Every believer should feel, "If the Lord has saved me, he can save anybody;" and that state of mind ought to be ours always.

yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her?

They had too much respect for him to ask such questions, except in their own hearts, but their Oriental prejudices made them marvel that he was talking with a woman!

28, 29. *The woman then left her waterpot*

She was too glad, too happy, to recollect so poor a thing as a waterpot. It was much to her before, but very little now. As one who finds a precious pearl forgets some trifle that he carried in his hand, so she "left her waterpot,"—

And went her way into the city,

Why should she stop any longer? The faces of the disciples did not look pleasant; but their Master had comforted her. She would not stop to lose that comfort by hard words from the disciples: she "went her way into the city."

So that blessed interview was broken up by Christ's own disciples. What a set of blunderers we are! We sometimes come in between Christ and poor sinners whom he is going to bless. There is many a lover of stern doctrine, with an unsympathetic heart and a harsh tone of speech, who has intruded just when he was not wanted. If we cannot help poor souls, brothers and sisters, let us never hinder them. What Christian would not wish to help a poor sinner to her Savior? Yet these disciples, unconscious of what they were doing, had by their very

looks driven this poor woman from their Master; but she “went her way into the city,”—

and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?

Her notion was, that when Christ came, he would tell all things. Here was a man who revealed her innermost secrets—was not he the Christ?

They must have been surprised to hear her talking about good things. There was no more likely messenger to win men, or to strike them with curiosity, than such a woman as this.

30–32. *Then they went out of the city, and came unto him. In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.*

So has every man who lives to win souls for Christ. There is a larder which he enters where the very delicacies of God are brought before him, and his soul is sustained and his strength is renewed by the dainties that the Lord has provided for those who do his will.

O beloved, there is a wonderful fascination about the blessed work of soul-seeking! When one is really anxious to bring a sinner to the Savior, eating and drinking are often forgotten. He is altogether absorbed in this holy pursuit; and the Master was more absorbed in it than any of us are ever likely to be.

33. *Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat?*

They did not like to ask him plainly; although they were very curious about the matter, they scarcely dared to pry further into it, and his next words may have deepened the mystery still further.

34, 35. *Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that*

sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

"Look at those Samaritans trooping out of the city, drawn by that woman's testimony concerning me. They are coming, at her invitation, to learn more about the Christ."

36–38. *And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors.*

The prophets had spoken and written concerning the Messiah, their words had prepared the minds of the Jews, and also of the Samaritans, to receive the gospel, so the great success of the apostles must not be traced merely to their teaching, but also to the preparatory work of the other laborers who had gone before: "Other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors."

The Church is always ready to praise her reapers; let her not forget her sowers. There are some of us, who bring many souls to Christ, who are greatly indebted to the work which was done by other men who preceded us. There are some who, perhaps, have few conversions although they preach the gospel faithfully, they are sowing, and there shall come others, by-and-by, who shall reap bounteous harvests as the result of their sowing the good seed of the kingdom. No matter who sows, or who reaps, the glory of the harvest shall be unto the Most High.

39. *And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did.*

Human testimony is frequently made the means of producing faith in men's hearts. That is evident to all. Hundreds of instances in proof thereof are present here this morning. A very large number of us owe our conversion to God to the personal testimony of others, who told us what the Lord had done for them, told

us in words, but also showed us in their actions, for we perceived the change that was in them; we saw their calm of mind under trouble; we remarked their general happiness; we noticed and we admired their holiness; and we were led, both by their verbal and practical testimony, to seek a Savior. This is the more usual mode of divine operation, that the testimony of one renewed soul should be blessed to another, and so the kingdom of Christ should be propagated in men's hearts.

40. *So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days.*

Two days of Christ's personal ministry—what might not come of that?

41, 42. *And many more believed because of his own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*

Personal experience is far more convincing than ever testimony can be. You may believe a thing because you are credibly informed of it, but you believe it a great deal more deeply and thoroughly when you have seen it for yourself.

43-46. *Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee. For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country. Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galilaeans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast. So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.*

Trouble first of all led this courtly personage to Jesus. Had he been without trial, he might have lived forgetful of his God and Savior; but sorrow came to his house, and it was God's angel in disguise.

The particular form of trial which visited this nobleman was the sickness of his

child. A little son he had, whom he dearly loved, and he was down with a deadly fever.

47. *When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judaea into Galilee,*

The father's heart was sadly wounded because his dear boy was at the point of death. No doubt he had tried all the remedies known to the times, had sent for every physician that could be found within miles of Capernaum; and now, having heard of one Jesus of Nazareth, who at Cana had turned water into wine, and at Jerusalem had done many mighty works, he resorts to him with eager petition and desperate hope.

The faith of this nobleman rested, at the first, entirely upon the report of others. He lived at Capernaum, down there by the sea; and amongst the newsmongers it was common talk that there had risen a great prophet who was working great wonders. He himself had never seen Jesus, nor heard him speak; but he believed the report of others; and he was right in doing so, for they were credible persons.

he went unto him,

His faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, though it was only a spark, yet influenced this nobleman. It led him to take a considerable journey to find our Lord. From Capernaum he went up the hills to Cana, that he might plead with Jesus. And he went personally. This is the more remarkable because he was a man of rank and position. Noblemen do not, as a rule, think of taking journeys themselves while they have so many servants at their disposal; but this nobleman came himself to Christ—

and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.

Notice the argument he used: he besought him that he would come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. He urged no merit, but pleaded the misery of the case. He did not plead that the boy was of noble birth—that would have been very bad pleading with Jesus; nor did he urge that he was a lovely child—that would have been a sorry argument; but he pleaded that he was at the

point of death. His extremity was his reason for urgency: the child was at death's door; therefore his father begs that mercy's door may open. When you, my friend, are taught by grace to pray aright, you will urge those facts which reveal your own danger and distress, and not those which would make you appear rich and righteous.

48. *Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.*

His faith was true as far as it went: but it was hindered by a desire for signs and wonders. Our Lord therefore gently chided him, saying, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."

Think of the Master only saying to this poor anguished father, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." It was sadly true, but it sounded honestly sharp. Oh, the dear lips of Jesus; they are always like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh! Myrrh, you know, is bitter to the taste, and there was a seeming bitterness about this speech to the nobleman; yet the father did not give up his suit, and turn on his heel, and say, "He treats me hardly." He said within himself, "to whom should I go?" and therefore he went not away.

49. *The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.*

Then see how passionately this man pleaded. He cried, "Sir, come down ere my child die"; as much as if he had said, "Lord, do not question me just now about my faith. O my Lord, I pray thee do not think of me at all, but heal my dear child, or he will be dead! He was at the point of death when I left him: do hasten down and save him." Limited was that faith, for he still asks Christ to come down, and seems to think it essential that our Lord should make a journey to Capernaum to work the cure; but note how intense, how eager, how persevering was his pleading. If his faith failed in breadth, it excelled in force.

50. *Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him,*

Here note that he believed the word of Jesus over this head of all his former

prejudices. He had thought only that Christ could heal if he came down to Capernaum, but now he believes, though Jesus remains where he is, and only speaks the word.

and he went his way.

The next thing this man did to prove the sincerity of his faith was that he at once obeyed Christ. Jesus said to him, “Go thy way”; that is, “Go home”—“thy son liveth.” If the man had not believed the word he would have lingered there, and kept on pleading, and looking for favorable signs; but as he has believed, he is satisfied with the word of the Lord, and goes his way without another word. “Thy son liveth” is enough for him.

51. *And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth.*

Still, I am bound to say concerning this man’s faith at this stage, that it still fell somewhat short of what it might have been. It was a great thing for him to have come so far; but he had farther yet to go. He expected less than he might have expected, and therefore, when He saw his servants, he asked them when the dear child began to amend. He was overjoyed when they virtually said, “He never did begin to amend; the fever left him all at once; at the seventh hour he recovered. You see, he expected a gradual restoration. He looked for the ordinary course of nature; but here was a miraculous work. He received far more than he reckoned on.

How little we know of Christ, and how little we believe in him even when we do trust him! We measure his boundless treasure by our scanty purses. Yet the faith that saves is not always full-grown: there is room for us to believe more, and to expect more, of our blessed Lord. Oh, that we would do so!

52. *Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.*

The seventh hour was about one o’clock in the day, and that day was “yesterday.” I know that the day closed at set of sun, yet one would hardly talk

of “yesterday” without a night between. Did he take fifteen or sixteen hours for that journey? If so, he did not travel with any excessive speed. It is true that twenty-five miles was a good day’s journey for a camel, for in the East the roads are execrable; but still it does seem to me that the happy father moved with the ease of a believer rather than with the hurry of an anxious parent. A nobleman’s usual progress through the villages was slow, and he did not alter the usual pace, because he would not even seem to hurry now that his mind was believingly at rest. He felt quite sure that his son was all right, and therefore the fever of anxiety left the father, even as the fever had left his child. Anxious minds, even when they believe, are in a hurry to see; but this good man was so sure that he would not allow parental love to make him act as if the shadow of a doubt remained. It is written, “He that believeth shall not make haste”; and in him it was literally fulfilled.

53, 54. *So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house. This is again the second miracle that Jesus did, when he was come out of Judaea into Galilee.*

At the same moment that Christ said, “Thy son liveth,” the nobleman’s son did live; the same word that Jesus used to the father was used also by the servants who had been thirty miles away; and, therefore, the father felt that something more than human had crossed his path. The more he studied the case the more wonderful it became. The details were singularly confirmatory of his confidence, and by their means he rose to a clearer and firmer faith.

Strengthened in his faith by his experience, after having believed the bare word of Jesus, the good man now sees that word fulfilled, and he believes in Jesus in the fullest sense, believes for everything; for his body, and for his soul; for all that he is, and for all that he has. From that day forth he becomes a disciple of the Lord Jesus. He follows him, not as a Healer only, nor as a Prophet only, nor as a Savior only, but as his Lord and his God.

The father did not know, when he went pleading about his boy, that he himself needed to be saved—the mother, also, probably thought only of her son: but now salvation has come to the whole family, and the fever of sin and unbelief is gone away with the other fever.

John 5

1. *After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

For he had respect to the Law. As long as the Law lasted, Christ observed it. Oh, that we were as careful to obey the rules of the Gospel as our Lord was to observe the ritual of the Law! Moreover, he went to Jerusalem because he had an opportunity of addressing great numbers of people there.

Fisherman like to cast their nets where there are plenty of fish; and fishers of men delight to be where there are many men who may be enclosed in the gospel net. “After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

2. *Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.*

This pool of Bethesda was rightly called “the house of mercy”; but it might have just as truly named “the house of misery”: for its “five porches” were the abode of many who were in misery, and who needed mercy.

3. *In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.*

What a sight for the Great Physician to look upon! The whole world must have been to him like one huge hospital, full of “impotent folk, blind, halt withered.” Wherever he went, he was surrounded by the sick, and sad, and suffering, those who were afflicted physically, mentally, and spiritually. But there was a special reason for the gathering together of so many sufferers at the pool of Bethesda.

4. *For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.*

It was the last remnant of miracle. Such things were common enough in Judea in her better days; but now the times of the prophets had ceased, and the day of miracles was almost over. Here, at Bethesda, were just a few relics and remnants of the good old days. Only one was cured, he that stepped into the pool first after the angel had troubled the water. It was but a scanty power that was left to the troubled water; but it was quite enough, if only one in a thousand was healed, to bring a crowd of people to wait around the pool. If only one person in a year were saved, I should not wonder if you thronged the place to hear the gospel that saved him; but your privilege is much greater. Here all who come, if they will hear and believe, shall find healing. It is not the first only, but even unto the last who shall step into the pool, that shall be healed.

5. *And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.*

That was a great portion of the man's life. If he was a full-grown man when he was attacked with the infirmity, he had now become old and grey.

6. *When Jesus saw him lie,*

The Great Physician fixed his eye on him, for his was an extraordinary case. Probably he was known and talked of as the man who had been paralyzed eight and thirty years. Note that it does not say, "When the man saw Jesus," but "when Jesus saw him." He did not know Jesus; possibly he had not even heard of his healing power and compassionate love. He was not seeking Jesus; but Jesus was seeking him. It was so with many of us; and therefore we sing—

"Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed his precious blood."

When Jesus saw the impotent man—

and knew that he had been now a long time in that case,

And a long time in that place, too—

He saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

That must have seemed a strange question. What was he there for, if not to be made whole? But I will show you, by-and-by, that there was wisdom in the question of Jesus. It was no idle curiosity that moved him to enquire of the man whether he was willing to be made whole.

7. *The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming,*

Shuffling along, as best I may, to the water's edge—

Another steppeth down before me.

Then, of course, the curative miracle is wrought, and the curative power of the water is gone until another season, when the angel troubles it again.

8, 9. *Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.*

This is our Sabbath. Oh, that we might have the same miracle wrought here tonight, upon many spiritually impotent folk!

10, 11. *The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured. It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed. He answered them,*

And he did answer them, too. It was a crushing answer.

He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.

That was his warrant. None but God could have made him whole. God can set aside any of his laws if he pleases; at any rate, whatever he commands, must be right.

12. *Then asked they him, What man is that which saith unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?*

They asked, “What man” had given this command. Why, if it had been a mere man who had said it, the impotent man could not either have taken up his bed, or have walked!

13. *And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.*

He never sought notoriety; but avoided popular demonstrations in his favor. The man who had been healed had exercised faith in Jesus, but he knew very little about him. A certain something in the air and mien of Christ had won his faith; but he did not know his name, or who he was. How small may be your knowledge, and yet you may be saved by true faith!

14. *Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.*

Probably, this man’s illness had been caused by sin. Christ bids him henceforth keep clear of sin, lest a worse calamity should come upon him.

15. *The man departed, and told the Jews, which had made him whole.*

Full of joy, full of delight, he must tell out the name of him who had cured him, as grateful patients like to sound the praises of their physician when he has been the means of healing them.

16. *And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.*

This was a mere pretense, an idle excuse for their enmity. They not only hated Christ; but they must besmear him with their calumnies, and make him out to be an evil-doer although he was goodness itself.

17. *But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*

The whole work of nature is continued on Sabbath-days as well as other days. Stars shine through the Sabbath-night, and the sun rises and sets on the Lord's-day as on all the days of the week. God's work continues. "My Father worketh," saith Christ, "and I work." "My work is my Father's work, and that goes on whatever the day may be."

18. *Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he had not only broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.*

They did not understand him to preach Unitarianism; they understood him to proclaim his own true and proper Godhead, and he never contradicted them, for he was God.

19. *Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.*

Christ's work runs parallel with that of the Father. The Father and the Son ever work in perfect harmony with one another.

20-22. *For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth; and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:*

The Son as well as the Father, is the Quickener of the dead. The Son is also the Judge of all men.

23. *That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him.*

As the universal Judge, the Lord Jesus is to be honored by all men, “even as they honor the Father.” Whatever others may do, or not do, we will honor the Father, we will honor the Son, and we will honor the Holy Spirit, three in one and one in three, the one God of Israel, for ever and ever.

24. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life*

If we truly believe the word of Christ, and trust in him who sent his Son into the world, we have at this moment everlasting life.

And shalt not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

What a grand verse this is! It is worthy to be written in letters of gold at every street corner; would that we all knew the fullness of its meaning by heartfelt experience!

25. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*

Whenever any dead soul does live, it is through the Word, but it is not through the voice of the preacher. That is but an instrument, and nothing more. The real voice that makes dead souls live is the voice of Christ Jesus.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is in Scripture, especially in the Gospel of John, called "the Word." Here his voice is spoken of, but what is a voice apart from the person that utters it? What is the Word which Jesus speaks by which dead men are quickened? Is not Jesus Christ himself the Word of God to man?

26. *For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;*

The Lord creates animal life: he puts breath into the nostrils of men and beasts; he gives also mental life—the life which thinks, imagines, doubts, fears, understands, desires. All life comes from the central fountain of self-existence in the great I Am, in whom we live, and move, and have our being. This Eternal One, who has life in himself, has sent forth his Son to give life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins, and he has girded him with his own power, "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself."

27, 28. *And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,*

It is by the word of Jesus that the dead shall rise, "for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth." Arrayed in such life-giving power no case of human corruption can be beyond the Redeemer's skill even those who rot, like Lazarus, shall come forth when he calls them, and the bonds of death and hell shall be loosed. Thus saith the Lord of life: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

The vision of Ezekiel's valley has become a fact since Jesus has appeared; and it is no marvel that it should be so, since the Eternal and Ever-living God has sent him. He can breathe the Holy Spirit into the dead soul, and give the heart that

palpitates with penitence, and leaps with desires after God. He can give eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. All that belongs to life he can bestow—the hearing ear, the speaking tongue, the grasping hand. The great obstacle in his way is spiritual death, and as with a word he can remove it, the salvation of man is no longer a difficulty.

29, 30. *And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*

How dead must they be who are not moved by the word, which arouses even the dead in their graves who have lain therein these thousand years! While this teaches us the stolidity of human nature and how depraved the heart is, it also reminds you who are careless that there is no escape for you; if you will not hear the voice of Jesus now, you must hear it then. You may thrust those fingers into your ears today, but there will be no doing that in the day of the last trump, you must hear then; O that you would hear now! You must hear the summons to judgment; God grant that you may hear the summons to mercy, and become obedient to it and live.

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

Christ as Mediator did the will of the Father, and yet also did his own will, for his will was always the same as his Father’s.

31. *If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.*

He did bear witness to himself by his miracles, but that was not the witness upon which he relied, nor was it the only witness to the truth of his mission.

32–35. *There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man:*

but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.

He reminded them that he had received the witness of John, and all men believed John to be a prophet. He had come as the herald of Christ, the promised Elijah, and he had borne witness, saying, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” Yet this clear testimony they had despised, and trodden under foot.

36. *But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.*

There is, perhaps, no better evidence of the truth of our Savior’s mission than his character, life, and miracles. The truths which he revealed, the perfections which he displayed, and the wonders which he wrought, all went to show that he was, indeed, anointed of God, and sent to be the Savior of men.

37. *And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.*

Three times out of the excellent glory had the Father said, “This is my beloved Son, hear ye him.” This was good evidence, whether they had heard it or not, and though he tells them that they had neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape, yet others had heard that voice, and seen the descent of the Spirit like a dove, and their testimony ought to have had weight with them.

38. *And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.*

Internal evidence, the evidence of a renewed heart, the evidence of joy and peace, the evidence of conscious pardon, the evidence of sanctification, this is the most convincing of all evidence to those who possess it. It is clear as the sun in the heavens, but they had not shared in it, and therefore felt it not.

39. *Ye search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*

These men were exceedingly well acquainted with the Scriptures. The scribes made it their business to transcribe the Old Testament; they learned chapters and books by heart. Many of them were so well acquainted with the letter of Scripture that they could tell you which was the middle verse in each book, and they have left us masoretic notes which tell us what is the middle verse of the Bible, and the middle letter of the Bible; and the like trifles. They were very curious and careful concerning all the little jots and tittles of the sacred manuscripts. They were great Bible-readers, great students of the letter, but they would not come to Christ; and hence the Scriptures themselves became a sepulcher in which they were entombed.

40. *And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.*

Hence, if we will now forget the unbelieving Jews, and only think of unbelieving Gentiles, there are to us tonight evidences concerning the Lord Jesus of the most convincing character: there are John's witness, the witness of the miracles, the witness of the voice of the Father out of heaven, the inner witness which many of our friends and kindred tell us of, and then the witness of the Holy Spirit in sacred scripture. All these show that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised Redeemer of man, that he is the appointed Mediator of the covenant of grace, and that through him there is immediate salvation for all who will believe on him.

The worst point about the whole conduct of the Jews was that, with all this witness in his favor, which they could not overturn, they would not come to him that they might have eternal life.

41–44. *I receive not honor from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?*

Some men find it difficult to believe in Christ because they are always seeking

honor for themselves; desire for the praise of men often blinds the mind and prejudices the spirit. How boldly our great Master speaks! There is no flattery on his lips. He is the faithful and true Witness, the very Word of God. Oh, that all men would give heed to his message!

45-47. *Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*

Now, those books speak plainly of Christ. It is marvellous that men conversant with Old Testament Scripture could see Jesus Christ, and observe his doings, and not discover that he was the Messiah, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write. What witness can be plainer than that of Isaiah? Here was testimony upon testimony, and yet in the teeth of it all the Christ was rejected.

John 6

1, 2. *After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.*

Many of them curiosity-mongers wanting to see more wonders wrought, others of them sick themselves, and anxious to be healed. Wherever Jesus went, a throng went with him.

3. *And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.*

That was his frequent posture when his disciples were gathered around him. He sat at his ease, and talked to his hearers. He was not very demonstrative in his oratory, but spoke calmly and quietly, and left the truth to find its own way into the minds and hearts of men.

4, 5. *And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that there may eat?*

They had been hearing him all day, and he had withdrawn a little from them, but they pursued him up the hill, and I doubt not that as they toiled up the hill they showed their faintness and their weariness, which led the Savior to see how much they needed refreshment.

They were in a lonely place out in the wilderness, where the people had no means of obtaining food, and Jesus knew that they would soon be faint with hunger, so he consulted with Philip as to what was to be done. It is great

kindness and condescension on our Lord's part to consult with his followers; he often did it, not that he needed their advice or help, but because they needed to be taught how to think and how to act for the good of others.

6. *And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.*

That verse is worth thinking over. How often does Christ seem to ask us riddles, and place us in difficulties, so that we begin to say, "What will come of this? How shall we escape from this temptation; or how shall we stand under this trial?" He himself knows what he will do; and it is a very blessed thing when our faith being tried, it shows itself to be strong enough to leave the burden with him who can bear it, and to leave the difficulty with him who can meet it: "He himself knew what he would do."

7. *Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them, may take a little.*

Two hundred pennyworth must have seemed an enormous amount to poor Philip, for all Christ disciples had made themselves poor by following him. The bag that Judas carried probably scarcely ever had as much as that in it. If it were all spent, it would not go far towards feeding five thousand men, beside the women and children.

That is our way. When our faith is little, we begin calculating the pennyworths that are wanted, and we make them out to be so much more than we possess or can possibly scrape together. That is not faith, it is reason—poor, dim, shallow reason, which forgets the Infinite, and begins to calculate its own limited and insufficient resources.

Men's calculations concerning divine things generally terminate in a deficit. Two hundred pennyworth is not sufficient. But Christ's calculations always terminate in a balance over, as we shall see. "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing may be lost." We, at our best, fall short of the mark. Our blessed Master not only does enough, but in his house there is bread enough and to spare.

8, 9. *One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto*

him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

These small fishes were commonly cured and dried by that lake, little fish very much resembling sardines or anchovies, and they were eaten dry as a relish with bread. This lad had five barley cakes and a couple of these little fish, that was all.

10. *And Jesus said, Make the men sit down.*

Or lie down, as it is, for they were accustomed to do that at feasts, and Christ would have them take their ease as well as enjoy their refreshment.

Now there was much grass in the place.

So it was a splendid dining-room. It was carpeted luxuriously. We learn from this that it was the Eastern spring time, for there is not much grass else; and there was therefore in Christ's banqueting hall the ceiling was of blue, and the floor of green grass. What more could they want, except the meat?

10, 11. *So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves—*

Common, coarse loaves of barley, not much esteemed even then as food.

And when he had given thanks,

Though out of doors, and "in the rough," as we say, he did not forget that. I know some that fall to, to their meals, like so many swine, and have not as much grace as chickens, that are sure to lift their heads whenever they take a drink, as if to bless God for every drop they receive. This gracious habit is going out of fashion among them.

He distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set

down

—Or reclining.

And likewise of the fishes as much as they would.

That is one of the rules of Christ's feasting always—as much as they would. According to your appetite, according to your will, according to your faith, so be it unto you.

12. *When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.*

Economy in the midst of bounty. However much we have, we are never warranted in wasting a single crumb. They had as much as they would, but they were not allowed to cast away the fragment.

13. *Therefore they gathered them together and filled twelve baskets with the fragment, of the five barley loaves which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.*

I am sorry to day that it is a mark of very poor people that they are often very wasteful people. These beggars, who had come only to be fed, were not satisfied to eat till they were satisfied, but they threw down pieces of bread.

But while I see the carelessness and wastefulness of the crowd, I also notice the carefulness and economy of Christ. He who could make food enough to feed the thousands at his will yet would not waste a crust. I think a large-hearted liberality should always be consistent with a strict economy. I have heard of one who called at a rich man's door to ask for a subscription, and he heard him scolding the servant for wasting a match. "Ah!" he thought, "I shall get nothing out of him." Yet he received from that very man a larger subscription than from anybody else upon whom he called during that day. Christ would give anything but he wasted nothing; let us imitate his example.

14. *Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.*

Men are often convinced by the argument of selfishness. They had been fed, and now they believed. But faith that depends upon a full stomach will despair when they get hungry again.

15. *When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.*

Our Lord Jesus had just wrought the miracle of feeding the five thousand men with five loaves and two small fishes, so he was very popular at that time. The people even wanted to some and take him by force, and make him a king, but he escaped from them, for he knew the value of that popularity. What was it but a puff of wind?" Probably, many of the very people, who tried then to crown him were among the crowds in Jerusalem who cried, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" And, nowadays there may be a great deal of anxiety to hear the gospel, yet very little result may follow from it. A crowded house of prayer is certainly a very hopeful sight, yet it may end in disappointment to those who are looking for souls to be won for the Savior.

16–17. *And when even was now come, his disciples went down unto the sea, and entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was dark, and Jesus was not come to them.*

Then it was very dark. Ah, my dear friends, perhaps you know what it is to be in trouble, and to mourn an absent Lord. This is a direful description of a specially dark night for the disciples: "It was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them."

18. *And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.*

Misfortunes never come alone. An absent Savior, a roaring sea, and a bellowing wind. What will they do now?

19. *So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus*

Here he is. Here is the first of their blessings. The first mischief is removed, and the rest will soon go. They see Jesus.

walking on the sea,

Oh, what a sight! A grander sight than to see him on the land; and it is a more glorious sight to see Christ in the time of trouble than it is in the time of prosperity. He is always sweet, but he is more marvelous when they see Jesus walking on the sea.

and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid.

Afraid of their best friend—trembling at their deliverer.

20. *But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid.*

Then they must have felt at ease at once as soon as they knew that it was Jesus who was walking towards them upon the water. Lord, if it be thou, fear would be foolish on our part; we are only too glad to have thy company.

21. *Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.*

The sea and the winds knew how not only to spare the vessel, but to carry it instantaneously to the place where they wished to be. But how often have you and I been rowing about, five-and-twenty or thirty furlongs, and we did not seem to be getting out of the storm at all; but the moment Christ has come, we have been where we wished to be. Oh, glory be to his name; there is no difficulty that you can be in, dear friends, but Christ can get you out of it in a moment, and bring you where you should be.

22–24. *The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one where into his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but that his disciples were gone away alone; (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat. bread, after that the Lord had given thanks:) When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus.*

Was not that a pleasant sight? So it seemed, but it was not. “Seeking for Jesus.” That is a good description of a man—seeking for Jesus. Ay, but they were only seeking for mere bread. They looked at Him as a breadgiver, and they were after him for that.

25. *And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither?*

They could not understand how he could have got there. Jesus answered them, and did not answer them. Some of Christ’s answers are evidently no answer at all. That is very often the best answer you can give.

26. *Jesus answered them and said, verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.*

He did not gratify their curiosity by telling them how or when he came there, for that was no concern of theirs. Neither is it the business of Christ’s preachers to spin ingenious theories about the gospel, or to tell pretty tales to amuse their hearers. Their business is to deal faithfully with men’s hearts and consciences as their Master did when he said to these people, “Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles.”

They said that at first, no doubt. Christ’s miracles dazzled them so they sought him in order to see more miracles wrought by him. This was not the highest

motive for seeking the Savior, but they had found a still lower one; they were now following him because they “did eat of the loaves and were filled.” Yet the Master did not reveal them, and thus he teaches us that it is better to follow him from the lowest motive than not to follow him at all. Perhaps some of us have been too severe upon certain people. We have said that they come to our place of worship out of mere curiosity. What if they do?

It is well that they come at all, so let us not cut even the spider’s web that links a man in any sense with Christ. That web may grow into a thread, that thread into a cord, that cord into a cable and there may yet be an unbreakable union between that man and Christ. That which begins in an inferior way may lead to something higher and better. Still, it is wise to let people know that they are not deceiving Christ, even though they deceive themselves as to their motive in seeking him. So he said to them—

27. *Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.*

Now, you quite understand what Jesus meant? Seek after that which will feed your souls. Do not hunt so much after bread for the body. Yet the Savior puts it very curiously. This is a double-shotted perplexity, a singular, curious kind of word. You are not to labor for that which you cannot get without labor, and you are to labor for that which you cannot get by labor. The Savior liked to put things in that sententious way, so that they might remember what he said. If they misunderstood him it was their own fault, for it is plain enough. God grant us grace to practice the meaning of these words. Why are ye so eager to get a bit of barley bread and a fish? Oh, that you were half as eager to come and get the bread which comes from heaven which will make a man live for ever, and which will be food to him as long as he lives.

28. *Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?*

They wanted to do the greatest of all works; for, by “the works of God” they evidently meant the most important, the most sublime, the greatest of all works: “What shall we do in order to work such works as these?”

29. *Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God that ye believe on him, whom he hath sent.*

This is a wonderful statement, which is just as true now as when Christ uttered it in Capernaum. The greatest and best work that any of you can do is to believe on Jesus Christ; though, in another sense, this is not a work at all, but ceasing from your own works, and resting in the finished work of Jesus Christ. But if any man would do that which is most acceptable to the thrice-holy God, let him believe on Jesus Christ whom God hath sent.

30. *They said therefore unto him, what sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work?*

This was a shameful question to put to Christ when they had so recently been miraculously fed by him, and so had received the best sign of his divine power in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Are you not wonderfully struck with the patience of Jesus?

31. *Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from, heaven to eat.*

Do you see the drift of their talk? They are still looking after the loaves and fishes; and, therefore, whatever Christ may say, they turn the discourse round that way. If they can get from Christ something to eat, they will believe in him; what grovelling, earth-bound creatures they were!

32. *Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven.*

Jesus did not say to them, “I gave that bread to your fathers in the wilderness,” as he might truly have said. It was not Moses who fed their fathers in the wilderness, it was God who had fed them, and if they would but think, they would clearly see that it was so. But the Master took them on to another tack, and led their thoughts to a higher topic.

33. *For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.*

What a strange expression, yet what a true one! The bread of heaven is Christ himself. You must come and take him to yourself, and trust him for your salvation, and in that way feed upon him, or you can never have the heavenly bread which both gives life and sustains life.

34. *Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread.*

This would have been a good prayer if they had understood the meaning of the Savior's words; but, as it was, it was a blind prayer. They did not know what Jesus meant when he spoke of the bread of God, which cometh down from heaven. They were thinking about the bread that perisheth, the bread for the body, so they prayed blindly when they said, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." Do you not think that many a prayer which children are taught in their childhood, and which men and women continue to pray for years, may be as blind a prayer as this one was? They know not what they ask, and the question very naturally arises as to whether it is a prayer at all.

35. *And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."*

"I will take away his need by removing his hunger; I will take away his pain by removing his thirst."

36. *But I said unto you. That ye also have seen me, and believe not.*

How the Savior brings the truth home to these people, and he might do the same to some of you. You pray, "Give us this bread;" and he replies, "I have given it to you, yet you have not eaten it. You have seen me, you have heard me, you know me, and yet you do not believe on me."

See, then, how little there was of advantage in the mere sight of Christ. Many

seem to think that it must have been much easier for people to believe in Christ if they had actually seen him, but it was not so. There were multitudes that saw him, and saw his miracles, and even ate the bread which came from his wonder-working hand, yet they believed not. Faith does not come in that way, for it does not come by sight, but sight comes by faith. Seeing is not believing, but believing often is seeing; it opens the eyes so that they are able to see what before was hidden from them.

37. *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

What a striking truth that was, with which to reply to them. You only come after me for bread, but you do not come after spiritual things. You do not believe in me. But, even if you do not, I shall not be disappointed, and my work will not fail. God has an election of grace, and that election shall be carried out. “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” And then, as if to cheer them up again, he says, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

38, 39. *For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.*

Christ will not lose one whom the Father gave him, nay nor any part of one. He will not lose the body of any one of his people any more than he will lose the soul of one.

40. *And this is the will of him that me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Christ will never have finished his work upon believers till he has raised their bodies from the grave, and glorified them like his own resurrection body. He will never cease from the work which he has commenced on any one of his people till he has laid the topstone in the glorious perfections of heaven; and this truth

is: the joy of our hearts even now.

41. *The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven.*

And there you see Christ has got no farther with them, but to leave them murmuring. And I believe that often the minister of God must expect to see no other result come of faithful testimony than for the people to murmur at him. But what if it be so? Will his Master blame him? No. No more than he blamed the Only Begotten. It must be so that there may be a separation between the precious and the vile—that God's chosen may be drawn out; while such as believe not, shall be judged, and, in their own consciences, shall be condemned.

42. *And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son, of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?*

This is just the way with men, they judge by outward appearances; and if the gospel comes to them as a thing beloved of poor men, if it be preached without much eloquence, if the service be without the attractions of sweet music or of gaudy attire, straightway they say there can be nothing in it. O blind bats, when God veils himself in human flesh, can it be otherwise?

43. *Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves.*

"I never thought you would believe in me; I never imagined that I should win your confidence."

44. *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. And I will raise him up at the last day.*

"You are not drawn unto me; therefore it is clear that you are not the subjects of divine grace. You think you are judging me, but in so doing you are really judging and condemning yourselves." Whenever men sit in judgment on the

gospel, they soon let us know what kind of spirit possesses them. It is not Christ who is on his trial, it is they themselves; and when they rail at him, they do but prove that the grace of the Father has never drawn them to him.

45. *It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*

This was as much as to say, “The Father has never taught you. You have learned nothing from him, or you would come to me; but in your rejection of me you prove that you are strangers to the grace of God.”

46. *Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.*

He corrects the notion into which they might have fallen that they could ever see the Father as he himself had seen him. Into that vision none of us can ever enter, for there is a peculiar divine relationship between Jesus and the Father which we cannot know.

47. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.*

This was how our Lord spoke straight to the face of those who had derided him, and said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?” With the strongest asseveration which he was in the habit of using, he says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life.”

48. *I am that bread of life.*

The food on which that everlasting life lives—living bread for living souls. O brethren, the dead letter is of no use to us. All the truth in the world, unto—“it be quickening, cannot feed our quickened natures. It in incarnate truth, even Christ that we must feed upon. “I am that bread of life.”

49, 50. *Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.*

For that manna of theirs was corruptible. We read that it bred worms and stank, and though it was an angels' food for a time, yet it was but temporary. It only fed a temporary life, and, like that life, it passed away. But Jesus Christ is incorruptible, and they that live on him live on incorruptible food, which nourishes the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever.

51. *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.*

Here we have the doctrine of the great atoning sacrifice by which sin is put away, and that is not merely Christ incarnate, but Christ yielding up his life, dying in the room and place and stead of guilty sinners. That is the food, whereof, if any man eat, he shall live for ever.

52. *The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*

They misunderstood the Master. They tarried in the letter, and did not reach to the spirit—the meaning, and that letter killed them, for "the letter killeth: the spirit giveth life." The inward meaning is that on which the Soul feeds. And so the unhappy Ritualist believes that he can literally eat the flesh of Christ, which, if it were true, were monstrous and could be of no service to him. Of what value is one flesh more than another flesh, if it is carnally to be considered? He loses the inner meaning. Blessed are they who are drawn of the Father and taught of the Lord—who spy out what is, after all, so little concealed beneath the thin veil of the metaphor.

53. *Then Jesus said unto them,*

What? Do you think he explained it? No, he did not explain to these Jews. They

were given up to judicial blindness. They had so long refused to see, that now they must not see, for on them was come the curse that, seeing they should not see, and hearing they should not perceive. Jesus did not explain to them. He just repeated the truth more emphatically, and made it more offensive to them than before. As well make a company of highwaymen a jury about theft, as make unconverted men to be a jury about what is truth. It cannot be. Christ does not condescend to that. He tells them the truth more fully and more offensively than before.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

Which he had not said before, and was more startling still.

54. *Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*

How necessary it is to have a spiritual understanding of the Scriptures! These metaphors have a sort of cannibal meaning about them to a man who goes no further than the letter, but the spiritual man knows that the soul feeds upon the doctrine of Christ's incarnation, and drinks in the truth of Christ's atonement. This is feeding, this is drinking, this is being nourished upon Christ's flesh and Christ's blood.

55. *For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.*

Meat and wine are, after all, only shadows; they feed the shadow-life of the flesh. Christ and his precious blood are the great realities, they nourish the true life of the spirit. Blessed are they who know what it is in spirit to feed upon these spiritual things!

56. *He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.*

These Jews would not understand Christ when he spoke very plainly. He did not

therefore retract a single word that he had said, but as the first light had dazzled them—and willingly were they dazzled by it—he turned the lantern full upon their faces, and made them blind, for the excessive light of the explanation was too much for them. It was not Christ's intent to save them; he was making the light itself to be blindness to them, because they had already refused him, and now the time was come when the heart of these people must be made yet more gross, that they should not see with their eyes, or hear with their ears.

May the Lord never give us up to such a fate as that! It is a dreadful thing when the light of the gospel becomes the instrument of blinding men, and it does so still. After a certain degree of willful rejection of it, that which would have been a savor of life unto life can be turned into a savor of death unto death by men's closing their hearts against it. Yet I wonder and am astonished at our Lord and Master's course of proceeding, that here, when the men do not and will not see, he does but speak the truth the more boldly.

Let no man think that Jesus was here alluding to the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine in the Lord's supper; that ordinance was not instituted at that time, and there could be no allusion to what did not then exist. It is quite in another sense, in a high spiritual sense, that our mind feeds upon the flesh and blood of Christ. That is to say, the fact that God was made flesh—the fact that Christ died for sin—these are the food of our souls, and thereon our faith grows, and our spirit is strengthened.

57, 58. *As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.*

The Savior goes over the same ground several times, there is a variety in his utterances, but in essence the meaning is the same. He wants to get it into our minds that we are to live upon him—that he, not self, he, not works, he, not our feelings, is the real food of the soul, by which that soul acquires and retains immortal life.

59, 60. *These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard*

this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it?

Preachers must not be astonished if they stagger their hearers when they proclaim the truth, they must not retract what they have said, nor tone it down, because so-and-so is offended by it. Truth is hard, especially to hard hearts. Every great truth is hard to a beginner in the school of Christ; but it is none the less to be taught, for that which is difficult today may become delightful tomorrow or whenever we are better educated in the things of God.

61, 62. *When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?*

He that is offended at any gospel truth may expect to be still more offended, for there are higher and deeper doctrines than Jesus had then uttered. If you stagger under the elementary lessons, what will you do when you get into the grammar school of divinity, and begin to learn the loftier lessons of the truth of God? Oh, for a faith that never staggers when Christ speaks, and that believes whatever he reveals!

63. *It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

“You are not to take them as if they were flesh, and understand them carnally. They do but embody my words do but embody a living soul of meaning, which it will be for you to receive if you are indeed quickened, and then it will quicken you, and you will understand me, and live in me.”

64. *But there are some of you that believe not.*

Some of Christ’s own disciples, some who had kept him company, believed not. This was a very sad statement for Jesus to be obliged to make; but it must be made today about many professed Christians: “There are some of you that believe not.”

For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.

He is not deceived by hypocrites; if we have crept into the church unworthily, he knows all about us, he knows us better than we know ourselves. Oh, that we might be very careful, watchful, jealous! May we abhor hypocrisy of every sort! It is impossible to continue in it without being detected; if it were possible we ought not to practice it; but with such an eye as that which is in the Head of the Church, even Christ, we cannot deceive; therefore, let us not attempt it.

65. *And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.*

No, not even though he were an apostle—though he came so near to Christ as to pray to him and hear his secret and most private communications, and to see his singular and special miracles yet he would not understand, except the Father gave it as a special act of grace.

66. *From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

Did he want them? I trow not. He desired not to have around him a mass of chaff, but the pure winnowed corn. Consequently he used his own word as the winnowing fan. And I believe, brothers and sisters, that wherever Christ is faithfully preached, preaching is the best form of church discipline.

Somehow or other, carnal minds get weary of it, and they go away, and those that have not a longing and a love for the truth drop off of themselves; so they walk no more with him.

67, 68. *Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter*

—Who was always to the front, ever ready to speak —

Answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.

That was a very conclusive way of answering one question by another: “Will ye also go away?” “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.” Brother, sister, if we wandered from Christ, where could we go? And how can we leave him when he has the words of eternal life?

69-71. *And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered them, have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot the son of Simon: for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.*

Our Lord often surprises us by the way in which he speaks; he does not say what we should have expected to hear from him, but he says something that is very startling, and even discouraging. It is the way of our Master, because he sees further than we do; and he often replies, not to the question as it lies in the words addressed to him, but to a belief in the heart at the back of the words. He did so here. Peter may have thought that “the twelve” were all steadfast and sincere, so Christ says to him, “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?”

John 7

1–5. *After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand. His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him.*

It is a very painful truth, that those who were the near relations of the Savior were not believers in his divine mission—at any rate, at first. He was truly a prophet who was without honor in his own country, and among his own kindred; and, on this occasion, they half taunted him concerning his claims. In effect, they said to him, "If indeed you are a prophet, get out into the world, and prove it. We hear that you profess to work miracles, then, why do you hide yourself away in this country place down here in Galilee? Begone to Jerusalem, and perform your wonders before the crowds in the capital;"—half hoping, perhaps, that his claims might prove to be true, yet not, at that time, at any rate, being themselves willing to become his disciples.

See how perverse is the human heart. These men might even live in close companionship with Christ, and even be nearly related to him after the flesh, and yet not be converted to him. So the best of men need not wonder if they have unconverted relations, and we may not feel certain that there is any fault to be found in their example if others are not converted by it; for, certainly, there was no fault in the example of Christ, yet "neither did his brethren believe in him."

Mark, also, that no earthly relationship is of any avail in the kingdom of heaven: "for neither did his brethren believe in him." So that, although I may be the child of godly parents, and one born of a long line of saints, yet I am, because of that,

no nearer to the kingdom unless I become myself a believer in Christ. Remember what Peter said on the day of Pentecost; you have often heard that passage of Scripture half-quoted, let me quote the whole of it to you; “For the promise is unto you, and to your children.” If you stop there, you do not get the true sense of it. “The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Therefore, that text teaches that there is no distinction between the children of believers and any other children. We must be called by the grace of God like the far-off ones, or else we shall not inherit eternal life.

6–8. *Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is alway ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil. Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ did everything, as it were, by the clock. His life was an orderly one; it was all arranged in the eternal purpose of God. The very day in which he should go up to Jerusalem was marked down, and he took care that he did not go before the right time. Now, half the power of a Christian life depends upon its being timely. The bringing forth of fruit in due season is one of the marks of the tree planted by the rivers of water; and one of the signs of the Son of man, who delighted in the law of the Lord, was that he said, “My time is not yet full come.” When it did come, then he went.

9, 10. *When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee. But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.*

Not with the great caravan that traveled, sometimes, with tens of thousands of people together going up to the feast, but with his own disciples in a quieter way.

11–13. *Then the Jews sought him at the feast, and said, Where is he? And there was much murmuring among the people concerning him: for some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth*

the people.

Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews. There was a general fear of violence that would come upon any who professed themselves to be his followers.

14. *Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.*

He was no coward, so he boldly showed himself in the midst of the throng in the temple.

15. *And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?*

Or, “How knoweth he the Scriptures? How has he come to be an instructed man, having never learned of the Rabbis? He has never passed through our schools of learning, so what can he know?”

16. *Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.*

“I am not the inventor of what I say; I am but a messenger, delivering the message of him that sent me.”

17. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

Any man, who is seeking after that which is right, and laboring to do that which is right, is a good judge of the truth. A practical life of godliness makes a man a far better critic as to what truth is than all the learning of the schools can do.

18. *He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no*

unrighteousness is in him.

If you ever hear a man speaking about the priesthood, meaning himself and his brethren; and about the Church, again meaning himself and his brethren; and about the sacraments, meaning certain performances by himself and his brethren; you may know at once that God did not send him. But he who speaks to the glory of God, and does not say, "Behold me; "but, "Behold the Lamb of God," he it is whom God has sent.

19. *Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Why go ye about to kill me?*

"Did not Moses say, 'Thou shalt not kill'? Then, you do not keep his law, though you profess such reverence for him, for, if you did, you would not go about to kill me."

20, 21. *The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee? Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and ye all marvel.*

"I did it on the Sabbath day, and you are all stumbling at that."

22, 23. *Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man. If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day?*

Surely, there was never a more triumphant answer than that.

24, 25. *Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment. Then said some of them of Jerusalem, Is not this he, whom they seek to kill?*

Perhaps some of the same people who had asked Christ, “Who goeth about to kill thee?” now enquired, “Is not this he, whom they seek to kill?”

26, 27. *But, lo, he speaketh boldly, and they say nothing unto him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ? Howbeit we know this man whence he is but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is.*

They had a notion—perhaps derived from that passage in Isaiah, “who shall declare his generation?”—that the birth of Christ would be hidden in mystery. At any rate, there was some cloudy idea floating about that it would be concealed.

28. *Then cried Jesus in the temple as he taught, saying, Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am:*

“And yet you do not know me.”

28–30. *And I am not come of myself, but he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me. Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.*

Something seemed to hold them back. Enraged as they were against him, a mysterious and mighty awe was upon them, so that they dared not touch him.

31. *And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?*

Well might they ask that question, for Jesus had wrought such marvellous miracles that they could not imagine anything greater. Surely this must be the Christ; or if he were not, when the Christ did come could he and would he do any greater miracles than this man had done?

32, 33. *The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him;*

Whispered these things, afraid to speak out boldly because of the Pharisees, and therefore they quietly said it among themselves, and, after all, there is no fire more to be dreaded than a smouldering fire.

The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him; and the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me.

"You may well let me alone now, for it will only be a little while, and then I shall be delivered into your hands, and you will no more be troubled with me."

34. *Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.*

No officers can arrest him now that he has gone up into his Father's glory; there is no fear of any of them being there to catch him in his speech, or to drag him before the ecclesiastical and secular judges, as they did when he was here.

35. *Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?*

That was always their fear. "Is he going to the Greeks? Will he be a teacher to them? Will he try to introduce them into the mysteries of our faith?"

36. *What manner of saying is this; that he said, Ye shall seek me and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?*

They appear to have had some intimation of that glorious love of Christ which was not to be confined within the bounds of the Jewish nation, yet they could not

or would not understand his words.

37. *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried—*

Shouted, spoke with all his might; and he stood, although he usually sat to deliver his message. But now, as if his whole being was roused to it utmost energy, on account of the last day of the gathering having come, when perhaps the people would go home, and he would be unable thus to speak with them again, “Jesus stood and cried,”—

Saying, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

O blessed invitation, how sweet it should be to every thirsty soul! “If any man”—prince or pauper, “any man”—moral or utterly debauched, “if any man thirst, let him come unto me,”—not to ordinances, nor to human priests, “let him come unto me, and drink,” as much as he will “without money, and without price.”

38. *He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.*

He will not only drink enough to satisfy his own thirst, but he will himself become a fountain, streams of grace shall be communicated to his fellowmen through him.

39. *(But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)*

He was not given then; but later, on the day of Pentecost, he was given, and he has never been withdrawn.

40. *Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet.*

The Prophet about whom Moses spoke.

41, 42. *Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?*

This was blessed testimony even out of the mouth of Christ's enemies. They objected against Christ what was indeed the fact, for he did come of the seed of David, and from the town of Bethlehem. There was he born; and though they called him the Nazarene—and he refused not the title—though over his head Pilate wrote, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," yet is he the Son of David, and his birthplace was at Bethlehem, though some of them knew it not.

43. *So there was a division among the people because of him.*

It is still true that Christ is a cause of division, as he himself foretold that he would be.

44. *And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him.*

He was immortal till his work was done. The hour for his death had not yet struck, and he must live on till the appointed time.

45, 46. *Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spoke like this man.*

The charm of his eloquence, the dignity of his person, his awe-inspiring demeanour, and a singular something—they knew not what—that Divinity that doth hedge about such a King as he was—restrained their hands. They said, "Never man spake like this man."

47. *Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived?*

"You sheriffs' officers are generally hard-hearted enough; are you also deceived?"

48. *Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?*

This was as much as to say, "If we have not believed on him—we who are the great dons of the nation—the rulers and the Pharisees—why, then, there cannot be anything in his claims. Just as some people seem to think that, unless there is a lord in a Society, unless there is an honorable somebody or other in the chair, there is nothing in it.

49. *But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed.*

They regarded the poor, common people as ignorant and accursed, whereas they, probably, knew as much about the law and the real spirit of it as these learned teachers did.

50. *Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,)*

Being a member of the council,—

51. *Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?*

He only asked a question, that was all; and, timid Christian, if you are placed where you cannot say much for Christ, if you have too great a fear upon you to vindicate your Master at any considerable length, yet say what you can; and, perhaps, the simple asking of a question may suffice to defend him. Nicodemus did but rise, and ask, "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" Nicodemus asked a simple question, but they could not answer it without convicting themselves of disobeying that very law of which they pretended to be the exponents.

52. *They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.*

Which was a lie, for prophets had come out of Galilee. Still, they denied it; and they were indignant at having such a question.

John 8

[Biblical scholarship since Spurgeon's time has shown that John 7:53-8:11 was most likely not part of the original text, and so we have not included his comments on those verses.]

12-15. *Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. The Pharisees—*

These wasps were always stinging him; when he drove them away once, they quickly returned to attack him again: "The Pharisees"—

therefore said unto him, Thou bearest record of thyself; thy record is not true. Jesus answered and said unto them; Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither go. Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.

He did not come for that purpose the first time; he will come, a second time, to judge all mankind.

16. *And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me.*

You see, brethren, how our Lord Jesus claimed to be God, for he put himself here in such a connection with God as would be quite inconsistent for any mere man. This is what Paul meant when he said that Christ "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," he thought it not a prize to be grasped, for it was already

his.

17, 18. *It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me.*

He did that by the miracles which Christ wrought; and they proved that he was indeed sent of God.

19. *Then said they unto him, Where is thy Father? Jesus answered, Ye neither know me, nor my Father: if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.*

They thought they knew his reputed father Joseph; they thought they also knew all about Christ, the carpenter's Son; but there is more in Christ, than carnal eyes can ever see. There is more in Christ than the most enlightened understanding, if it be but natural understanding, can ever perceive. These blind bats, the Pharisees, neither knew Christ nor the Father. If they had known him, they would have known the Father, for Christ is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person."

20. *These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come.*

Like our Lord, every child of God is immortal till his work is done. This ought to divest us of every kind of fear. The enemy cannot lay hands upon a Christian until his Lord wills it: and when his hour has come, then it behoves not the child of God to resist the Father's will.

21. *Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.*

Oh, what a terrible sentence is that! I pray that the Lord may never say that to any of us, "Whither I go, ye cannot come." That would be the death-knell of all

our hopes, and would make our life one long banishment. Blessed be his name, we who have sought him, and have found him, know that; we shall not die in our sins; and whither he has gone, we shall go also.

22-24. *Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above:*

You are of a grovelling nature; your thoughts rise out of the abyss where every evil dwells.

Ye are of this world; I am not of this world. I said therefore, of you, that ye shall die in year sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

If ye have no faith in Christ as the Son of God, "ye shall die in your sins." What an awful thing it will be to die in your sins! What cerements for your eternal burial! What a robe of fire in which to lie down for your long sleep, and then to find no sleep because of it! "Ye shall die in your sins." I should like this short, stern sentence to ring in the ears of every unbeliever. This is not my word, but Christ's own word—the word of the most loving and tender Savior: "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

28. *Then said Jesus unto them;—*

That is, to the Jews who were questioning and opposing him,—

When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.

Blessed be God, there were many, after the crucifixion of Christ, who did believe in him! Yet, alas! in others, the blindness of heart continued, and they would not see the Messiah in him who was crucified. We, who believe in the uplifted

Savior, can see the Father in the Son; and to us, faith has become a most blessed thing; and we know that he does nothing of himself, and that, as the Father has taught him, so he speaks.

29. *And he that sent me is with me:*

This made Christ's life so calm, so deeply joyous amid all its sorrow. "He that sent me is with me." Servant of God, canst thou say the same? If so, it is thy joy, thy confidence thy strength. God grant that we may each one of us realize that blessed presence of our Lord!

For I do always those things that please him.

Let us labor earnestly to be able to say that. If there is anything which would not please God, let us have nothing to do with it; if it would not please God, it ought not to please us. Blessed shall that servant of the Lord be, who can sincerely say, "I do always those things that please him."

30, 31. *As he spake these words, many believed on him, Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;*

For there were many, in Christ's day, coming to him for a while, and then going away from him; professing to believe, and then stumbling when Christ proclaimed some doctrine which struck them as being strange and hard to receive. Our Lord Jesus tells them that constancy is necessary to true discipleship. It is of no use to start running in the race unless we continue in the course till the prize is won. We are not true pilgrims to heaven merely because we cross the threshold of our door; we must keep on, and on, and on, till we reach the golden streets of the New Jerusalem.

32. *And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

That is the result of being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. With Christ, who is the truth, to be our Teacher, and the Holy Spirit to bless his words, we come to

know the truth; and the operation of the truth upon the heart is to deliver us from the bondage of sin and of error.

Some who heard this message of our Lord caught at it; they were always on the watch for anything to cavil at and contradict, and therefore—

33. *They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?*

What a falsehood this was of theirs! They were at that very time in bondage to the Romans; they had been subdued and conquered: and, a little while after, they themselves confessed that they had no king but Cesar. Men are not very chary about telling falsehoods when they wish to resist Christ: they will do anything rather than believe on him.

34. *Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.*

The man who habitually lives in sin is not a free man, for he is still a slave to sin. If he finds pleasure and delight in disobeying God, he has no right to talk about being a free man. His chains are rattling on his wrists; what can he know about freedom?

35. *And the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the son abideth even.*

A servant may be dismissed from the household, but a son may not. If we were only servants of God, we might fall from grace, and perish; but if we are the sons of God, we never shall. If we ever did, in truth, call God "Father," we shall always be able to use that blessed title, for the relationship of fatherhood is not a temporary one, sad cannot come to an end.

36. *If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.*

If you have the freedom of sonship, you are free indeed. There are none so free

in our Father's house as his children are.

37, 38. *I know that ye are Abraham's seed;*

"I know what a boast you make of that."

but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father.

It is a common characteristic of children to tell what they see; what they witness at home, they are sure to tell abroad. If you are a child of God, you will act and speak like your Father does; and if you are a child of the devil, you will act and speak like him. Our parentage may be discovered by our acts and our words: "I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father."

39. *They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham.*

The real descendants of "the father of the faithful" are themselves faithful; that is, believers. The father of believers has believers for his children: "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." Our Lord had admitted that these Jews were Abraham's seed according to the flesh; but he proved that they were not Abraham's seed in the high and spiritual sense, since they were not like him whom they claimed for a father.

40-42. *But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father.*

He had not told them who that father was; but as it is a standing rule that men do the deeds of their father, the genuineness of the descent which they claimed

could be tested by their likeness to their father.

Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me:

Any man who is born of God must love Jesus Christ. The purity of his motives, the loveliness of his character, the charms of his person, would all be sure to win the heart of a man who was truly born of God.

For I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.

If any man has a right idea of God, and really loves God, if he will study the character of Christ, he will see that Christ is the very image of God in human flesh, and he will fall in love with Christ. That result is inevitable.

Men form wrong ideas of God; and then, when they read the life of Christ, they see no likeness between the Christ and their conception of God; nor is there any. But if they would take their idea of God from God's own Word, then they would see that, in the person of the Man of Nazareth, the Divine character truly shines out, but it is toned down so as to meet the human eye without the excessive glare that would blind it. But it is the same Light of Light, the same Love of Love, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, "for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," he is the express image of God, and he who truly knows God will know that Christ also is God, for Father and Son are one.

43. *Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word.*

"You are dull of comprehension, you are hardened in heart, you are proud in spirit, you are just the opposite of everything that is good, and therefore you cannot hear my word," saith Christ; "and this is proof positive that you do not love God, and that you are not the children of God."

44. *Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.*

Remember from whose lips these words fell, even from the lips of the gentle Jesus. Honest speech is the surest token of a loving heart; but, nowadays, if a man preaches the truth plainly and faithfully, men say that he is hard and unkind; but if a man glosses over the truth, and alters it according to his own idea of what will please men, then they say, "He is a kindly-disposed and large-hearted man." I should be disposed to doubt whether he has any heart at all, if he will sooner see sinners damned than offend them by proclaiming the truth. I thank God that some of us care little about offending those who offend God. If men will not yield themselves unto the Lord, we want not their friendship, but we will strive to make them uneasy in their rebellion, and if they resolve to be lost, we will at least be clear of their blood.

He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Falsehood is his natural element. When Satan deceives, he only acts according to his nature, which is blackened with falsehood through and through.

45, 46. *And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?*

Oh! matchless argument! Now were they silent indeed. His whole life was before them; he had not lived in secret and yet he could appeal to his whole life, from the first day even to this time, and say, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" It is this that weakens our testimony for God that we are so imperfect and full of sin. Let us seek to imitate the Master, for the more clean we are from these imperfections, the more shall we be able to shut the mouths of our adversaries.

47. *He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not,*

because ye are not of God.

What a wonderful character was the character of Christ! We get a strange light cast upon it as we read this dialogue in which he endured such contradiction of sinners against himself. My brethren, in Christ there is all the tenderness of a woman; but do not think that he is effeminate, far from it. What masculine force, what vigor what power, there is in him!

There are some people who, if we speak plainly against error, tell us that we are uncharitable, and that we have not the spirit of Christ. Is it so? Did there ever fall from any lips more burning words than those which we find here, when he is brought into conflict with his foes? The fact is, he is meek and lowly, but he is most courageous; he is genial and kind, but he is honest and true. He speaks with suavity and gentleness; but, at the same time, there is great force about every expression that he uses. He does not mince matters when he is dealing with sin. There is no velvet on his lips; he utters no honeyed phrases. Naked truth flashes, like a scimitar from its scabbard, when he has to deal with those who oppose the truth.

48. *Then answered the Jews and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil.*

Always abuse your adversary if you cannot answer him: this is always the devil's tactic. When he cannot overthrow religion, then he seeks to append opprobrious titles to those who profess it. It is an old and stale trick, and has lost much of its force. Our Savior did not answer the accusation of his being a Samaritan, but inasmuch as what they said about his having a devil would touch his doctrine, he answered that.

49–51. *Jesus answered, I have not a devil; but I honor my Father, and ye do dishonor me. And I seek not mine own glory: there is one that seeketh and judgeth. Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death.*

What glorious gospel brilliance Christ suddenly flashes upon these men! He promises even to them that, if they will keep his saying, they shall live for ever,

they shall be partakers of an eternal, unquenchable life. It might have seemed to us to be like casting pearls before swine to proclaim that great truth to such hearers; but our Master's infinite wisdom does not permit us to think so.

52, 53. *Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom mayest thou thyself?*

"What dost thou pretend to be? Someone greater than Abraham and the prophets?"

54–56. *Jesus answered, If I honor myself, my honor is nothing: it is my Father that honoreth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: yet ye have not known him, but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.*

He will not answer their questions, for they do not ask that they may learn. They ask that they may cavil; so he multiplies his riddles. He lets the light blind them yet more, Now he speaks, not so much of the undying life of believers, as of his own eternal existence, long before the prophets and Abraham of whom they had spoken.

57. *Then said the Jews unto him, thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?*

They allowed a wide margin in specking of our Savior's age, for he was only thirty-three years old. It may be true that the sorrows of his life had so marred his countenance that he looked more like a man of fifty than one of three—and-thirty. I cannot tell, nor do I know whether that is what they meant; but it is singular that they should have said to him, "Thou art not yet fifty years old."

58. *Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.*

They had asked him, “Whom makest thou thyself?” and now they have his answer: “Before Abraham was, I am,” saith Christ. It is the very name by which God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush, “I AM.” Yet Jesus takes this title to himself: “Before Abraham was,”—not, “I was;” notice that; but, “I am;” as if his life was one continued present existence, as indeed it is, for with God there is no past or future, but all things are ever-present to his infinite mind. When Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am,” he claimed the Godhead, he declared that he was certainly God, self-existent from all eternity.

59. *Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.*

They believed that he claimed to be God, as he certainly did, and therefore they tried to stone him; and there is no foothold for those who say that Christ was a very good man, but only a man. If he was not the Son of God, he was not a good man, for no good man would have left upon his followers, and upon his foes, too, the impression that he claimed to be God, if he was not; and no good man could have claimed to be God if he was not really so. Rank him either amongst the grossest of impostors, or else as the Son of God—one or the other. There is no halting-piece between the two. Blessed be thy name, O Son of Mary, thou art also the Son of the Highest, and as such we worship and adore thee!

John 9

1. *And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth.*

Therefore the man could not see Jesus, but the more important matter was that Christ could see the blind man. And you, dear heart, may not yet have learned to look on Christ, but he can look on you in your blindness, and a look from him will speedily work a wondrous change in you.

2. *And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*

The procedure of these disciples is very much like that of many people in these days; they are much more ready to ask questions about sufferers than they are to sympathize with them. If the hearts of the disciples had been in a right condition when they saw this blind man, they would have said, “Lord, cannot this poor man’s eyes be opened?” But, instead of risking like that, they were full of idle curiosity, which prompted them to raise metaphysical difficulties, and to ask foolish questions. So they wanted to know how it was that the man came to be born blind. Was it in consequence of some sin on the part of his parents, or through some sin of his own in a previous state of existence, (for some of them seem to have had even that foolish notion,) or was it because of some sin of his, which God foresaw that he would commit, and therefore laid this affliction upon him from the hour of his birth?

3. *Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*

That is to say, this blindness was not the result of special sin in any individual,

but God intended that his works of mercy and of grace should be manifested through his affliction. It is a cruel thing when every form of malady or disease is traced to some fault in the person who has to suffer from it. This is infamous; I had almost said infernal; for Satan himself could hardly devise a more false and wicked thing than to say that, because a man is a special sufferer, therefore he must have been a special sinner. It is not so; for, often, some of God's truest children—some of those who live nearest to him—are those who keep the night watches through pain, or they are bedridden from year to year, or are deprived of some of their limbs, or in some other way are full of suffering. This is in order that, in their case also, the works of God should be manifest in them as they were in this poor blind man.

What a very blessed way of looking at evil—as an opportunity for God to manifest the power of his works of grace by getting rid of it! I wish that everyone here would look upon the evil within his own heart in this very hopeful light, and say, "There is something in me for God to conquer. There is some spiritual disease in me for the great Physician to heal. There is space in my poor soul for the Lord himself to work some miracle of mercy."

4, 5. *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*

Our Savior felt that he was commissioned as a servant of his Father, sent here to do a certain work, and he must be doing it. It is well for God's servants to feel a holy compulsion; it does not take away from them the freedom of their action, and their delight in the service of God; but still it exercises a powerful influence over a man when he feels, "Woe is me, if I preach not the gospel;" or when, like the Lord Jesus, he says, "I must work the works of him that sent me." Did the Well-beloved, the Prince of Heaven, come under compulsion? Did he put himself under that "must" which is for the king? Then you and I may well put ourselves under holy bondage for the Lord. There, do not hinder me; do not tell me that I am too feeble in health; "I must work the works of him that sent me."

6, 7. *When he had thus spoken,*

There was no long discourse to be delivered while this poor man was waiting to

see what would happen to him. Our Lord spoke just a few words to his disciples, and then went at once to the miracle he intended to perform.

he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.)

Our Lord often works miracles without means, and sometimes with means which appear to be quite inappropriate. It would seem to be more easy to blind a man with clay than to open his eyes with it; and there are some who assert that the gospel plainly spoken would lead men into sin, but it does not. It is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." If you go to work in the name of God, if you put the clay on the sinner's eyes, and bid him go and wash, you will see what will happen.

He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

This blind man did exactly as he was bidden to do. What a blessing it was for him that he received the clay on his eyes, and simply went and washed it off again as the Savior bade him! That was all he had to do, and then he came back seeing clearly. Oh, if sinners were only attentive to gospel directions, and then were obedient to them, without adding to them or taking from them, how many more blind eyes would be very speedily opened, and how greatly would Christ be glorified!

8, 9. *The neighbors therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, is not this he that sat and begged?Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he.*

With that downright simplicity and shrewdness which marked his whole character, the man said, "I am he." He did not go beating about the bush at all, but he straightway acknowledged that he was the man of whom they were speaking.

10, 11. *Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened? He*

answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight.

Very straightforward, very concise, very accurate, and when we make answer about our conversion, it is always well to take this for a copy—not too many flourishes, no coloring. He even leaves out about the spittle, but he gives it all as he can recollect it; so when you are talking about the Lord's love to you, and his way of converting you, it is quite sufficiently remarkable, without any touch of rouge. Let it be given just as it is.

12. *Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not.*

There are a good many things concerning Christ which you may not know, but if you know that he has opened your eyes, you may be well content with the knowledge of that until he shall be pleased to reveal more about himself to you.

13. *They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind.*

I am sure that this was a very distressing sight to them, for there was nothing that ever grieved their hearts more than for Christ's power to be displayed. They did not want to see the blind man whose eyes Christ had opened; if the miracle brought Christ any glory, it brought them just so much misery.

14. *And it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.*

So you may be sure that the Pharisees would be down upon him for that, because, according to the Rabbis, the making of the clay to put upon this man's eyes would be a kind of brick-making, and they would bring him in guilty of brick-making directly. So did these men pervert things and make men guilty where no offense had been committed whatsoever.

15. *Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight.*

That seemed to be the principal question with them; they always wanted to know the manner in which Christ's cures were wrought.

He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.

That is shorter than his previous account of the miracle. When Pharisees ask a carping question, the shorter the answer the better; it is a pity to cast pearls before swine.

16. *Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.*

Yes, and there is a division among the enemies of Christ always; they cannot agree among themselves. If they could always lay their heads together, and agree, they might have greater power; but the Edomites draw their swords against the children of Ammon, and they are sure to slay one another in the long run. There were also some among these Pharisees who had a conscience, men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea; and they asked, "How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?"

17. *They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes! He said, He is a prophet.*

He was a brave man, who dared to say what he believed whether he offended or pleased. He did not know much, but what he did know he did know, and he was quite certain about it. There are some men whose breadth of knowledge is as remarkable as its shallowness. It is like water upon the meadows when a river overflows its banks, and covers a wide area, but there is scarcely an inch of depth. Give us the narrower river that is deep, and that can bear onwards to the ocean a noble fleet, rather than the wide expanse of useless, shallow water.

18. *But the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been*

blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight.

You see, John gives to the Pharisees the name which they arrogated to themselves: “we are Jews.” But they were not true Jews. They called themselves Jews, and so John speaks of them as “the Jews.” It often happens that a certain clique or party will run away with a name which does not belong to them any more than it does to a great many who differ from them very widely. These Pharisees pretended that they would not, believe the miracle. It was manifest before their eyes; but yet they would not believe it until they called his parents.

19–21. *And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? how then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.*

And so he did. He was one of those people who can speak for themselves; and it is greatly to be wished that many more of those who have been cured by Christ could do the same. He was a conscientious man, who, without fear of offending or any desire to curry favor, spoke out honestly what he knew—nothing more.

This was very shrewd on his parent’s part; but I think that I must add that it was very cowardly to throw all the testimony on their son. There are some parents who, if their children do right, if they follow Christ, seem to leave them to take care of themselves.

22. *These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue.*

Excommunicated; and they could not bear to be cut off from the respectable society which they had hitherto enjoyed.

23, 24. *Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. Then again*

called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner.

How piously these Pharisees can talk; and generally in the name of God all sorts of mischief begin. When men are persecuting the Son of God, yet still they take the name of God upon their lips. Did they not burn the martyrs to the glory of God? Oh! yes, and so did these men thus slander Christ by saying, "We know that this man is a sinner," and yet they spoke about giving God praise.

They thought that they could smooth the man over, so that he would say no more. "We know—we who know everything, we who are the rulers and teachers of the people—we know that this man is a sinner." That might have closed the mouths of many men; but, on that occasion, they had before them a person who could not easily be made to believe all they chose to say—a sharp, shrewd man, who had keener eyes in his head, even when he was blind, than they had while they could see.

25. *He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.*

He could not be beaten out of that. You cannot argue a man out of an experience of this kind; and if the Lord Jesus Christ has ever opened your eyes, dear friend, nobody can make you doubt that blessed fact.

26, 27. *Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?*

He threw a little sarcasm into that last question. The man was a very remarkable person, a simple-hearted, honest man, but withal quite able to hold his own in any company.

28, 29. *Then they reviled him*

Of course, that is the usual way with those who are in the wrong. Abuse the plaintiff when you cannot answer his case. “Then they reviled him,”—

and said, Thou art his disciple but we are Moses’ disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.

Where could he have come from but from God? Who could have wrought such a miracle unless he had been sent from God?

30. *The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.*

They were the gentlemen who said, “We know,” and they wanted, a little while before, to silence him by parading their superior knowledge; so now he turns upon them, and says, “Herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes.”

31–33. *Now we know that God heareth not sinners:*

He meant men who are living in known sin, impostors and deceivers. Of course, God would not hear sinners of that stamp.

but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.

This was bravely spoken. The man did not, at that time, know the Godhead of the Savior, but he felt that he must have come from God, that he was one of God’s servants, or messengers, or prophets, therefore he avowed what he knew. Dear friends, always act up to the light you have enjoyed. If you have starlight, thank God for it, and own it before men, for then he will give you moonlight;

and if you have moonlight, walk by it, thank God for it, and own it, and he will give you sunlight; and when you have sunlight, walk in it, and so, one of these days, you will come to that light which is as the light of seven days, the light of God himself.

34. *They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?*

Their dignity was touched; their superlative wisdom lifted them so much above this poor man that they said, with the utmost disdain, "Dost thou teach us?"

And they cast him out.

It was a great mercy for him that they did excommunicate him, one of the greatest blessings that could come to him was that of being cast out of the synagogue, and being cast out of the society of such men as those Pharisees were.

35, 36. *Jesus heard that they had cast him out;*

Jesus knew all that had happened to this man, but someone probably related the story to him; and our Lord knows all about each one of us, and he knows whether anyone here is suffering for his sake or for the truth's sake. Jesus knew that they had cast him out—

And when he had found him,

For he always finds those whom the world or false professors have cast out—

he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

He was a sensible man, and he had the sense to perceive that knowledge rightly used leads to faith. He desired to know in order that he might believe; and if you

ever say that you cannot believe, but are anxious to do so, then make enquiry as to what is to be believed, examine the evidence concerning it, and so faith will come to you by the operation of God's good Spirit.

37. *And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.*

I scarcely remember that, up to this time, the Lord Jesus had given such a manifestation of himself to anyone except to the Samaritan woman at the well. When she mentioned the Messiah, he said to her, "I that speak unto thee am he;" and here he reveals himself to this man as the Son of God, which was somewhat more than that woman probably meant by the term "Messias."

38. *And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.*

Then was his cure indeed complete. He had seen Christ spiritually as well as naturally, and fell at his feet, and worshipped him as the Son of God.

39. *And Jesus said, For judgement I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.*

Christ is the turner of the tables. Did not the virgin mother sing, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and he hath exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he hath sent empty away"? So he ever does.

40. *And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also?*

"Are we blind?" It seemed impossible to them that it could be so. Jesus answered them with scathing words—

41. *Jesus said unto them, If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but*

now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.

You acknowledge that you have sinned with your eyes open, and, therefore, your sin is all the greater. It would have been better for them if they had known their blindness, and applied to him who could give them sight, and forgive their sin.

John 10

1. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.*

The positiveness of our Lord's teaching is noteworthy. Whatever may be said about dogmatical teaching now, it is certain that his teaching is of that character. He does not raise questions, but he solves them. He does not suggest probabilities, but he declares certainties. This might be taken as the key-word to all the Saviour's teaching, "Verily, verily." He makes a strong asseveration; he speaks as one having authority, not as the scribes who only claimed to have authority, but as the Sent One of the Father who really has it: "Verily, verily, I say unto you." Whatever comes to us with the imprimatur of the "Verily, verily," of the Son of God is not to be questioned or doubted by us for a single moment.

"He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." Christ himself did enter by the door. He came according to the ancient types, and symbols, and prophecies. He came as God said that he would come. He entered by the door. There is no irregularity about Christ's office as the Shepherd of his sheep. It is confirmed to him by the sanction of the Holy Ghost. The witness of the Father is borne to him: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him." We rejoice to think that Jesus our Savior is also Christ the Anointed. He is Jesus to us, but he is the Anointed of the Father. He comes by right as the appointed Shepherd of the sheep entering in by the door.

2. *But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.*

The true Shepherd cares for the flock, the false ones are thieves and robbers who only care for the flesh or the fleece.

3. *To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.*

Here the people of God are compared to sheep. Their harmlessness and gentle character, their feebleness and quiet in the fold, their profitable uses, their defenseless state, requiring some one always to watch over them, the patience with which they are led to the shearer or to the slaughter, and the constancy with which they are associated with sacrifice, render sheep a most excellent symbol of the people of God. Doubtless the fold is the Church, within this fold all the saints of God are gathered, not always in the visible, but always in the invisible and indivisible Church of Christ.

None may set up to be shepherds of this fold except those who come in a proper and fitting way, and that is not by a pretended apostolical descent, that is, not by a commission which they have received from their own assumption, but by a commission direct from Christ—coming in through him as by the door. The great true Shepherd, the antitype of all shepherds is Christ himself. To him the porter openeth. All the prophecies, which, like porters, kept the gates, opened at once to Christ; all godly hearts, which, like the porters of the gate, were watching for the coming of the true Shepherd, opened at once to Jesus; whether it were Anna or Simeon, they at once confessed him.

The sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. We are told by Eastern travelers that in the large district folds into which the sheep-farmers put their different flocks, while they are all assembled in one common flock, the shepherd of any one flock has but to make his appearance and begin to speak, and his sheep at once recognize him. Though another person should dress up in his garments they would take no notice of him; they know their shepherd by his voice.

4. *And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him:*

“He goeth before them.” There is never an act prescribed by Christ for his followers but he first performs it himself: “He goeth before them.” Other professed leaders drove the book before them. The Jewish teachers laid heavy burdens upon men, and grievous to be borne, which they themselves did not

touch with one of their fingers. It is the distinguishing mark of the good Shepherd that, “when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them.” You are not bidden to do as a servant what the Master would not do. Even if it is the menial occupation of washing the saints’ feet, he himself has done it; you are to lay down your life for the brethren, for Jesus himself has done that: “He goeth before them, and the sheep follow him.”

For they know his voice.

There is an instinct, a God-given instinct, in the elect of God, by which they know Christ’s voice. When once the Spirit of God has changed their natures, they have an open ear for the words of Jesus: “the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.”

5. *And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.*

Others will follow the stranger, but the sheep will not do so. We read of some that they were full of such deceivableness that they would, if it were possible, deceive the very elect, but there is an “if it were possible.” The Lord’s true sheep cannot, will not, long be deceived: “they know not the voice of strangers.”

6. *This parable spake Jesus unto them but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.*

They thus proved that they were not his sheep, for they did not understand his words.

7. *Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.*

No one metaphor can fully describe our glorious Lord, for he is both Shepherd and Door to the sheep, and all else that they need.

8. *All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep*

did not hear them.

Some people did hear them; one pretended messiah and another led different companies of deluded followers after them, “but the sheep did not hear them.” The prophetess Anna, the holy waiting Simeon, the guileless Nathanael—these did not hear them; their ears had not yet caught the mystic tone which belongs only to the true Shepherd’s voice: “The sheep did not hear them.”

9. *I am the door: by me if any man enter in,*

Jesus, the great I AM, is the entrance into the true church, and the way of access to God Himself. He gives to the man who comes to God by Him four choice privileges.

he shall be saved,

None can be lost who take Jesus as the door of faith to their souls. Entrance through Jesus into peace is the guarantee of entrance by the same door into heaven. Jesus is the only door, an open door, a wide door, a safe door; and blessed is he who rests all his hope of admission to glory upon the crucified Redeemer.

and shall go in

He shall be privileged to go in among the divine family, sharing the children’s bread, and participating in all their honours and enjoyments. He shall go in unto the King of kings in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the secret of the Lord shall be with him.

and out,

This blessing is much forgotten. We go out into the world to labour and suffer, but what a mercy to go in the name and power of Jesus!

and find pasture.

He who knows Jesus shall never want. Having made Jesus his all, he shall find all in Jesus. His soul shall be as a watered garden, and as a well of water whose waters fail not.

10. *The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

You who have eternal life may have more of it. You may be spiritually stronger, more vigorous, more clear of eye, more happy of heart, more active in service. Life is a blessing, but abundant life is a greater blessing; we want not merely to breathe, just to live. We want to have much life, that we may enjoy it, and may use it for the glory of God. Christ has come that we might have life more abundantly; may we all make use of his coming to that end!

11–13. *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.*

Just now the contrast was between the Shepherd and the thief, here it is between the Shepherd and the hireling. The hireling cares for himself, the Shepherd cares for the sheep, and provides for them and cares for them even at the cost of his life. Christ is the good Shepherd, and therefore he never fled as the hireling fleeth. He cared for the sheep, for they were his own. The wolf might come, but the good Shepherd was ready to meet him. He would not have his sheep scattered, but he would gather them in the cloudy and dark day, and in every time of danger he would be the center around which they might rally.

14. *I am the good shepherd*

This good Shepherd proves himself to be so by his actions. Remember how carefully he watches his sheep, not one of them ever being absent from his eye for a single moment. How graciously he guides those sheep, leading them

always by a right way that he may bring them to safety at the last. How plentifully doth he pasture his flock, making them to lie down in green pastures beside the still waters.

And oh! how gloriously doth he defend his flock, dashing into the thickest of their foes, snatching the lamb out of the jaws of the lion and out of the paw of the bear. And we must not conclude this list of his deeds without remembering how readily he hath bought that flock, and how well he hath washed that flock, in blood flowing from his own veins, that he might present them all at the last, not one of them being wanting, nor one of them impure, but each of them like sheep that come up fresh from the washing.

and know my sheep,

It is not as if salvation was left to haphazard. He knew them before they were created. Having foreordained he did foreknow. He knew them when they did not know themselves when they were wallowing in the mire like swine he knew them still. He knows them now—unknown to fame, unregistered, perhaps, in the books of the visible Church. “I know my sheep wherever they may be.”

and am known of mine.

This is the practical way by which you may judge whether you are his or not: “I am known of mine.” They know him as their only hope and trust, they know the sweetness of fellowship with him; they know the power of his arm, the efficacy of his blood, the faithfulness of his heart; they know the preciousness of his cross, and the glory of his grown.

15. *As the Father knoweth me, even as know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

Christ here sets forth the intimate knowledge that there is between himself and all his people—as much as there is between the Father and the Son. It is wonderful teaching, full of depth and spiritual power. As the Father knows the Son, and the Son knows the Father, so certainly does Christ know his Church, and his Church knows him, or shall do so in the future.

16. *And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice:*

No recognition of free-will here. Christ speaks as one who has the hearts of men in his control. He knows who are his that as yet are not called. He does not say he hopes they will yield to hear his voice, but they shall. Oh, irresistible grace, what can stand against thee? The blood-bought shall all be blood-washed; the foreordained and foreknown shall yet know him who hath saved them by his blood. In this we ought constantly to rejoice. The feebleness of the minister is no barrier to the carrying out of God's purpose, nor is the hardness of the human heart any impediment to the completion of the divine degree. "Them also must I bring." There is a heavenly necessity that all the chosen should be saved.

and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.

Or, more correctly, "one flock, one Shepherd." The flock would never be complete without those "other sheep" which the Shepherd says he must bring into the fold, and which he says shall hear his voice. Not one of them will be missing in the day when they pass again under the hand of him that telleth them.

17, 18. *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*

The voluntariness of Christ's sacrifice is its glory, and well may his Father love him because of it; and well may we, who are eternally to benefit by his death, also love him.

Herein lay much of the effect of the death of Christ, that it was voluntary, that he had power to lay down his life, the right to lay it down, and the right to take it again. When any ordinary man dies he only pays "the debt of nature." If he were even to die for his friend, he would simply pay a little earlier that debt which he must pay ultimately, but the Christ was immortal, and he needed not to die except that he had put himself under covenant bonds to suffer for his sheep.

19–21. *There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad, why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?*

Christ's sayings always cause a division between those who hear them. There must always be two opinions, just as there are some who are his sheep and some who are not. When you go and try to speak for Christ, do not be at all astonished if people ridicule you. What did they say of the Master himself? "He hath a devil, and is mad." They will not say any thing worse than that of you. And when they have said it, what does it matter? Hard words break no bones. So have courage enough to bear opposition, and you may, like your Master, yet find some who will defend you, for there may be those who will say, "These are not the words of him that hath a devil."

22–24. *And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long canst thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.*

They professed that they wanted to know more certainly concerning him. This was a vain pretense, for he had told them all they needed to know, and they had not believed him. Therefore he answered them to a large degree by making them know more about themselves. Sometimes the point in which a man is deficient is not as to the gospel, but as to his own need of it. He may know all of Christ that is needful for his salvation, but he may not know enough about himself and his own lost condition; and therefore he is not in the way in which Christ becomes precious to him, because he is ignorant of his deep and terrible need.

25, 26. *Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.*

This was a brave utterance of our Lord. Those who are Christ's chosen and redeemed people in due time come to believe in him; but he does not say to the

Jews, “You are not my sheep, because you do not believe.” He tells them the same truth in another way, “Your not believing is a proof that you are not my sheep.”

27, 28. *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish,*

Christ has secured to them the priceless boon of eternal security in him. No sheep of Christ shall ever be lost. None that he has purchased with his blood, and made to be his own, shall ever wander away so as to perish at last.

They have a tendency to spiritual sickness, but their Shepherd will doctor them so that they shall never perish. They are sheep, and have a tendency to wander; but their Shepherd shall keep them so that they shall never perish. Time tries them, and they grow old, and the novelty of religion wears off; but they shall never perish. Think what you will of them, “they shall never perish,” for so the promise stands.

neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

Many will pluck at them, but none shall pluck them away. The devil will give many a horrible pluck and pull, to get them away; but out of the great Shepherd’s hand he shall never take them. Their old companions, and the memory of their old sins will come, and pluck at them very hard, and very cunningly; but the Savior says, “None shall pluck them out of my hand.”

Some one wickedly said, “They may get out of his hand themselves.” But how can this be true, when the first sentence is, “They shall never perish”? Treat Scripture honestly and candidly, and you will admit that the promise “they shall never perish” shuts out the idea of perishing by going out of the Lord’s hand by their own act and deed. “They shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.”

Who is to loosen the clasp of that hand which was pierced with the nail for me? My Lord Jesus bought me too dearly ever to let me go. He loves me so well that his whole omnipotence will work with that hand, and unless there is something greater than Godhead, I cannot be plucked away from that dear, fast-holding

grip.

29. *My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.*

But see the Father, he puts his hand over the hand of Jesus! There, now: you are inside two hands, "And no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." Oh, the serene security of those who hear the voice of Christ, and whom he calls his sheep! A double-handed force keeps them safe against all ill. Pluck away, Satan! You will never pluck them away from the hand of Jesus, and the hand of his Father!

30. *I and my Father are one.*

He says, "I and my Father are one;" and especially one in love to his people. "The Father himself loveth you," even as he loves his Son; and, while you read the love of Christ in his death, you must read the Father's love quite as much in that great sacrifice.

31. *Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.*

These are the ultimate arguments of unbelief—stones. There is no sense in stones, no reason in violence, yet ungodly men, when they have nothing else to use, throw stones at the Teacher of the truth. Is this generous? Is this wise? If you do not believe the testimony, at least let the Testifier alone. Yet it is not in the nature of men to do so. Their stones are ever ready when they are unable to answer the Christ. They had done it previously when he said unto them, "Before Abraham was, I am;" but as he escaped their malice then, so did he at this time.

32. *Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?*

Towards no man had he acted unjustly or even harshly. He had been all tenderness and lowliness in every place towards all sorts of men, and yet certain men became incensed against him because of his goodness. Did they refuse to

love him because he was altogether lovely? Did they despise him because he was so truly great? Such is the depravity of the human heart that the very virtues of Christ provoked the hostility of men.

33-39. *The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand,*

When our Savior found that there was nothing to be done with the bigoted Jews, but that all he said and did only provoked more furious opposition, he escaped out of their hand, and went away. He knew when to speak, and when to refrain. Divinely guided, he neither fled as a coward, nor rashly pushed on where nothing could be gained.

40, 41. *And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true.*

They began to speak of John. Do you wonder? It was the natural topic to discuss upon the spot where John at first baptized. “John did no miracle, but all things that he spake concerning this Man were true;” therefore this Man is the Messiah. This is he of whom he said, “Who coming after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.”

We believe not in the sacredness of places; but, still, where a good man has labored for the Master, there often lingers a holy fragrance which is a means of

blessing to others. Many of those people had probably heard John's testimony to his Lord, and the trees by the river's edge, and the flowing stream, would always remind them of the Baptist, who there urged them to repent of their sins? Now the good man is dead and buried, but the soil which he had ploughed is the better prepared for the Master's seed-sowing, and the Master knows that he will have all the greater harvest in that place because John has been there before him

42. *And many believed on him there.*

Though our Lord left the obstinate, he never ceased to do good. He did not say, "It is of no further use to preach and plead; I am, therefore, driven away to Bethabara, by the lonely Jordan, and I will warn the people no more." Nay, rather, as many resorted to him there, he went on with his teaching, and in that place many believed on him. Though Jesus withdrew from the stones which filled the hands of angry Jews, he went to that place where John had said, "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

John 11

1. *Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha.*

To many people, it may have seemed an event of no particular importance that “a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany,” but great consequences often depend upon what appear to us to be very minor matters, and we must not despise the least of the Lord’s people, nor think slightingly of anything that concerns them. When a king or an emperor is ill, the news is published in all the papers; but when a friend of the Lord Jesus, a man “named Lazarus of Bethany,” was sick, that event was recorded in the Bible because of something very remarkable which was to follow that sickness. Lazarus was a son of God, and grace makes greater distinctions than earthly rank and worldly honors ever can make.

2, 3. *(It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.*

They did not say any more. They felt that it was quite enough to tell him that Lazarus was sick, and they left it to the tender heart of Jesus to do whatever seemed good in his sight. Some prayers would be all the better if they were shorter—all the better if they did not so much declare our own will as declare our confidence in the good will of Christ. I like the omissions of Martha’s and Mary’s prayer.

4. *When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death*

That was not to be the end of it; God had quite another purpose in view in allowing Lazarus to be sick

But for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

Jesus knew that Lazarus would die, but he also knew that his death would only be a kind of interlude; the great design of God was not to take Lazarus home at that time, but to glorify his Son in the resurrection of Lazarus from the dead.

5. *Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.*

Yet Lazarus died. Jesus loved Lazarus, yet Lazarus was sick. Jesus was not of that cruel sort of people, of whom we have some in these days, who call themselves saints, and who attribute all sickness among God's people to their sin or to their want of faith. Not he. Here was one that was sick, but Jesus loved him just as much for all that.

6. *When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.*

Notice the connection. "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus"; and yet when he had heard that Lazarus was sick, "he abode two days still in the same place where he was." Sometimes true love may think fit to make us wait. It may be the truest love on God's part to let us lie sick, and not to come post-haste to us to make us well. Ay, the truest love may demand that the sickness should turn to death, for out of the death he may bring the greater glory. The Lord acts not upon the scale of man, for he sees not as man sees. He sees the end as well as the beginning.

7. *Then after that saith he to his disciples, Let us go into Judaea again.*

And that because he loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. If that love in its wisdom made him tarry, yet that love in its sincerity at last moved him to seek

the house of grief.

8–10. *His disciples say unto him, Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee; and goest thou thither again? Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him.*

Christ felt that his day was not over, and that he could not die before his work was done, and therefore he did not fear the stones cast by unbelieving foes. So, my brother, at all risks go on with your God-given work; you will live through your twelve hours, and you will not live a moment longer. Be so much a believer in predestination that, even if duty calls you to risk your life, you will bravely do it, knowing that you are in the hands of God, and that your life cannot end until your appointed twelve hours have expired.

11. *These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth: but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.*

It is the Savior's way to use terms concerning his miracles, which, so far from exaggerating them, even appear to depreciate them. He is about to raise a man from the dead, but he says, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." I am afraid that our tendency is always to describe our actions in the largest possible terms consistent with truth; perhaps, sometimes forgetting those last words. But the Savior describes truthfully what he does, but still in terms which, like his humanity, seem to veil the glory. Wonderfully condescending is it of him to speak thus.

12. *Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.*

It is considered to be a sign of getting better when a patient can sleep.

13, 14. *Howbeit Jesus spoke of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.*

Let me remind you, my dear brethren who preach the gospel, that you will have to preach very plainly, for you see that even the apostles could not understand a figure of speech. When Christ said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth,” they mistook his meaning, so he had to say plainly, “Lazarus is dead.” That is how we must preach the gospel; not only so that our hearers can understand it, but so that they cannot misunderstand it.

15, 16. *And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe, nevertheless let us go unto him. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.*

Thomas always took a dark view of things, so he thought his Master was going to be killed; but he was a brave disciple, for he said to the other disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” There are still many very timid, despondent disciples, but they cling to Christ, and, if necessary, they would die for him, as Thomas was willing to die with him. God bless you, Thomas! There are worse men than you, and not many better.

17. *Then when Jesus came, he found that he had lain in the grave four days already.*

You know that, in the East, they have to bury the dead almost immediately because of the heat of the climate; so that Lazarus was, not long after he was dead, put away in the family vault.

18. *Now Bethany was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off:*

An easy walk of somewhere about two miles.

19, 20. *And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.*

You will often hear people praising Mary at the expense of Martha, but although Mary is commended for sitting at Christ's feet, Martha here was the first to meet her Lord. The varying characters of different persons come out best at different times. Mary is best at sermon-time, she forgets the cups and the platters, but Martha is the more practical in the time of grief. She is active, and does not give way as Mary does. She is not so contemplative, and not so crushed as Mary is, so she is the first to go to meet her Lord.

21. *Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*

There seems to have been just a tinge of reproach in Martha's words, and Mary said exactly the same words to their dear Master and Friend a little later; and I have often heard Martha and Mary talk in this fashion: "Oh, if we had only had another doctor!" or, "If our dear friend had not gone to the seaside;" or, possibly, "If he had gone to the seaside, he might not have died." Well now, beloved friends, you have grief enough in having lost your relative or friend without adding to it by these unwise suppositions about what might have happened if you had done something else. Do not fall into that mistake, and wound yourselves and grieve your best Friend by unnecessary and useless regrets.

22. *But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.*

There is faith there, and there is unbelief, too. She believes that Christ can have what he wills of God, but she does not recognize his own personal Godhead—his own power to work resurrection.

23, 24. *Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*

She could not believe the joyful meaning that Christ meant to convey to her when he said, "Thy brother shall rise again."

25, 26. *Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection—*

Note that our Lord did not say, “I am he who raiseth the dead;” but, “I am the resurrection,”—

And the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

She looked upon the resurrection and the life as things that were to be in some dim and misty future. “No,” says Christ, “I am the resurrection and the life. Not only do I get these things by prayer from God, but I am these things.” And then he goes on to explain it. He says, “I am the resurrection. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. I am the life. Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” He has taken her out of the thought of this poor common animal-life into the thought of the spiritual and higher life, which is, indeed, to the soul what the resurrection is to the body. It was well for the Savior thus to teach her higher truth than as yet she knew.

27. *She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.*

By which she as good as said, “I believe that, and I believe everything else. I have an implicit faith in thee. Whatever thou sayest, whatever thou hast said or shalt say, I am prepared to believe it all, for I believe in thee. I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”

28. *And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly,*

Because she knew that the Jews hated the Savior. She could not tell what would come of it if they knew of his coming, so she whispers to her—

saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee.

Martha's title for Christ might be rendered, "The Teacher, The authoritative Teacher," yet I am glad our translators put it "The Master."

29. *As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him.*

The coming of Christ had such an effect upon her that she arose from amid the ashes of her sorrow, and went out to meet her dear Lord and Master.

30. *Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was at that place where Martha met him.*

Their cemeteries were outside the town, and probably the Savior was near the very grave where Lazarus slept.

31. *The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there.*

It is significant that these mourners did not follow Martha when she went to meet Jesus, but they did follow Mary. Sometimes, sinners who are not converted by listening to one preacher, are blessed by the testimony of two. One sister may not be able to lead her brother to Christ yet God may enable two to do it. Jesus sent out his seventy disciples "two and two," and the apostles are usually mentioned in pairs—Simon and Andrew, James and John, Phillip and Bartholomew and so on; and we shall find that two Christians can often accomplish what one alone could not do.

32. *Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his knees, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*

Her thought was just the same as the thought of Martha, but she did not say so much as Martha. She never did. Martha had a dialogue with the Savior, but Mary bowed at his feet.

33. *When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled,*

His heart was full of sympathy; he felt the grief of these mourners, and sorrowed with them.

34, 35. *And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept.*

Who but a man should weep? Weeping is a human speciality. Jesus never seems to be more completely bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh than when he weeps.

36–39. *Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died? Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave.*

Many have asked why Christ groaned. Why, brethren, it is the way in which he gives life—by his own death. We say sometimes of one who does a great action, "It took so much out of him." So it did out of the Savior. He must groan that Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus may rejoice. It is not without the stirring of his very life that he gives life to the dead.

It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.

"Wilt thou expose that corrupt corpse to the air?" Ah, me! what poor foul creatures we are through the Fall! See what we may, any of us, become in a few days, so that even the one who loves us best will have to say of us, "Bury my dead out of my sight."

40, 41. *Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest*

believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

That groaning in spirit was Christ's prayer to his Father, that inward tumult of his soul was his earnest supplication; and now he thanks his Father that he has heard him. Yet Lazarus was still dead, and lying, a mass of corruption, in the grave. Oh, for faith to bless God for the mercies that are on the way to us!

42, 33. *And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me, and when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.*

He simply repeated the dead man's name, and added two commanding words. This was a simple business enough. Dear friends, a miracle seems all the greater when the means used are apparently feeble and little adapted to the working of so great a result. It is so in the salvation of men. It is marvellous that such poor preaching should convert such great sinners. Many are turned unto the Lord by the simplest, plainest, most unadorned preaching of the gospel.

The thunder of Christ's voice was attended by the lightning of his divine power, and forthwith life flashed into Lazarus and he came forth.

44. *And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin.*

He probably slipped himself off from the ledge in the tomb upon which he been laid, and there he appeared before them bound so that he could not move farther.

Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

See what wonders our Lord can work, and ask him to work similar miracles in the spiritual realm, and to raise to life those who are dead in trespasses and sins.

45, 46. *Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.*

We could hardly have conceived it possible that men would have been guilty of such conduct as this to post off to Christ's enemies, and lay it as an accusation against him, that he had raised a man from the dead.

47, 48. *Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.*

They pretended that if Jesus Christ gathered to himself a great party, the Romans would take umbrage at it—pounce upon the whole nation and destroy it, for fear of its revolting from under their sway. A gross falsehood throughout.

49, 50. *And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all. Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, And that the whole nation perish not.*

That was his advice. You are, none of you, up to the mark. You do not handle this thing rightly. Let us kill this man. Let him be put to death—not that he deserves it, but that it is expedient that it should be, lest our nation should be destroyed; and this is the way that governors and kings have been accustomed to think—not "Is it right?" but "Is it expedient?" and we may always pray to God that we may have a Government that will do that which is right, and not be guided by the evil direction of that which is expedient. One has well said that if the death of a righteous man would save ten thousand, yet it would be an atrocious thing that he should be put to death unwillingly for the saving of any. The right is, after all, expedient.

Yet Caiaphas did not know what he said. He was speaking a great truth.

51. *And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation:*

He did not understand his own words. He was saying a great deal than he meant to say—for it was expedient—blessedly expedient—that Jesus should die and willingly and of his own accord, giving himself up to death for the sake of his people.

52, 53. *And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.*

One bold wicked man can often sway the counsels of men who are equally bad, but more cowardly. It had not yet come to this—that they would hurt him to the death; but now they take counsel to put him to death.

54. *Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples.*

We do not find that he wrought miracles there or preached, but in a holy and devout retirement, it may be, he prepared his mind for the last great week—the week of his passion and his death. It is generally best for us to imitate him in this; and when we have some great work to do—something that will need all the grace that we can get, it is well to make a retreat—get into retirement, and school the heart, and seek to drink in fresh strength that we may be prepared for that which lies before us.

55, 56. *And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand: and many went out of the country up to Jerusalem before the passover, to purify themselves. Then sought they for Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple, What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?*

They had heard much of him in the country. Country people coming to town want to hear the great minister—to see the great Prophet: so that is their question, “Will he come to the feast?”

57. *Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that, if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him.*

They could not deny the miracle: they could arrest and punish the miracle-worker.

John 12

1. *Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.*

The days Christ was to spend upon the earth were getting to be very few so he paid another visit to that Bethany home where he was always so welcome, and more so than ever since he had raised Lazarus from the dead.

2. *There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.*

Martha served: she had not given that up. She was a wondrous housewife, and she did well to keep to her occupation. Lazarus had been dead, and had been raised again. But he was not the center of interest: “He that raised him up was there.”

3. *Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.*

All the members of the re-united family were present, Martha busy as usual with the domestic duties which fell to her share, Lazarus in close attendance upon the Master who had wrought so great a miracle upon him, and Mary in her own sweet and gracious way pouring out the wealth of her affection in honor of the Master.

4-6. *Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred*

pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

The question of Judas was a most unworthy one, but the motive that prompted the question was worse still. Little did he care for the poor; but if he could have had the selling of that very costly ointment of spikenard, he would have made that an opportunity of enriching himself.

Observe that the sharpest critics of the works of good men are very often no better than they should be. This Judas is indignant with what Mary does, and claims that he cares for the poor, but all the while he is thief. Whenever a man is very quick condemning gracious men and women, you may be quite as quick in condemning him. He is a Judas usually.

7. *Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.*

Somebody or other always seemed to object to Mary. If Martha does not do it, Judas will. To be found guilty of excess of love to Christ is such a blessed criminality that I wish we might be executed for it. It were sweet to be put to death for such a crime. It was that that Christ died of. He was found guilty of excess of love.

8. *For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.*

Christ was himself ever caring for the poor, so he would not discourage any effort on their behalf, but just then, one of his most devoted disciples desired to render to him special honor, and he would not let her be rebuked; but on the contrary, he pointed out the deep symbolical meaning of her loving action.

It is not every day that you can do something personally and distinctly for Christ himself, and therefore, whenever the occasion serves you be sure to be there to avail yourself of it. True, you can serve him indirectly by aiding his poor saints. Still, something for him—for him himself—should often be devised as Mary devised this service that day.

9. *Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there: and they came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead.*

Their curiosity was but natural, for few of them could have seen anyone who had been raised from the dead. It is well when a saved soul, who has been spiritually raised from the dead, becomes a center of attraction together with the Lord who has wrought such a miracle of mercy upon him.

10, 11. *But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death; because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away, and believed on Jesus.*

They would have committed a double murder if it had been possible, and would have put to death both Jesus and Lazarus, who was a living witness to the wonder-working power of the Christ whom they would not receive as the promised Messiah. When men hate Christ, they also hate those whom he has blessed, and will go to any lengths in seeking to silence their testimony.

12, 13. *On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.*

It is significant that John is the only one of the four Evangelists who mentions the palm fronds that were carried by the people in this triumphal procession in honor of Christ, and it was to John that the vision was given of the "great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," who "stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

14, 15. *And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.*

Even in the little glory of a temporal kind, which was given to the Lord Jesus Christ when he was here among men, his humility and meekness were very manifest, thus fulfilling the prophecy recorded in Zechariah 9:9: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”

Oh, that all his people would always be of such a lowly spirit, not seeking great things for themselves, but condescending to men of low estate, remembering that it was their Master who said to his disciples, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

16. *These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.*

It is strange that Christ’s own disciples did not at once remember this plain prophecy when it was so literally fulfilled, yet, before we condemn them, let us recollect how “slow of heart” we also have been “to believe all that the prophets have spoken.”

I wonder whether, when Christ comes back to earth, in the glory of his Father with the holy angels, we also shall not understand a great many things which are complete mysteries to us now. Peradventure, it will be said of us then, “These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him.” That first glory of his ascension to heaven shed a flood of light upon the life of Christ, as doubtless the greater glory of his second advent will shed a yet brighter light upon our understanding of the things of Christ which quite surpass our comprehension now.

17. *The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record.*

They could not help testifying in his favor after they had seen him work such a notable miracle as the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

18, 19. *For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold, the world is gone after him.*

No doubt many of his disciples thought so too, yet how mistaken were both the friends and the foes of Christ, for you recollect, brothers and sisters, that Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem was followed, within less than a week, by a far different scene, when the same crowd that cried "Hosanna!" shouted "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" The world, that was supposed to have gone after him, nailed him to the cross; so short-lived is human popularity.

So short-lived also is the admiration of Christ by carnal minds, for they do admire him after a fashion, they cannot help doing so. There have been written lives of Christ, which have been full of admiration of him, yet equally full of opposition to his Deity. We must not always regard it as an encouraging sign when men praise Christ; for very soon, if the root of the matter be not in them, and they do not accept him as their Lord and Master, they will change their note, and instead of "Hosanna!" it will be "Away with him, crucify him!"

20, 21. *And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: the same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.*

They were proselytes, who had learned to worship Jehovah. Something more than mere curiosity must have moved them to want to see Jesus. Having heard of his raising the dead, they had a desire, and a very proper desire, to know more of him, so they asked to be introduced to him by one who, though not a Greek, had a Greek name, and who may therefore have served as a kind of bridge for these Greeks to reach the Savior.

22. *Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.*

The disciples encouraged these seekers; they would not have brought mere

curiosity-mongers to their Master, but they saw that there was something better in these Greeks; so they consulted together, and their opinion was that they must tell Jesus about them.

23. *And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified.*

Christ's passion and death were getting very near when these Gentiles came to him, and he saw, in that company of Greeks, the vanguard of that great army that shall yet come to him out of every nation under heaven. In the prospect of that great ingathering, he looked beyond the impending shame and suffering, and spoke even of the hour of his death as the time when he should be glorified.

24. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much, fruit.*

The preservation of the corn is the prevention of its increase; but the putting of it into the ground, the losing of it, the burial of it, is the very means of its multiplication. So, our Lord Jesus Christ must not care for himself, and he did not. He surrendered himself to all the ignominy of the death of the cross, he died, and was buried in the heart of the earth but he sprang up again from the grave, and ever since then myriads have come to him through his death, even as these Greeks came to him in his life. Now, as it was with Christ, so is it to be with us; at least, in our measure.

25. *He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.*

To hoard your energies will be really to destroy them, like hoarded wheat which in the end becomes useless; but to give up your energies, to expend your life-forces, this is to sow the wheat, and this is the way to ensure the harvest.

If we are really to glorify Christ on the earth, we must be willing to lose our reputation, our good name, our comfort, and indeed everything that we have, for Christ's sake. This is the only way truly to live. If, for your own sake, you begin

to keep back anything from Christ, that is the way to die. You would then be like the grain of wheat that is laid by, and preserved, and which, therefore, can never grow or multiply.

Surrender yourself; be willing to be nothing; be willing to die if only the truth may live. Care nothing about honor and glory for yourself; care only about the honor and glory of your Master. Learn the meaning of the Master's paradox. As you bury yourself, you will multiply yourself. As you are put out of sight, like a grain of wheat that is sown in the ground, you have your only opportunity of growth and increase; heavily-laden ears of corn shall spring up from the grain which has been buried in the earth.

26. *And where I am, there shall also my servant be:*

You cannot expect better lodgings than that; so, as Christ had to live here amid sorrow, and sin, and shame, you must be willing to do the same; but, as Christ was afterwards exalted to indescribable honor, so shall it be with you if you are his true servant.

If any man serve me, him will my Father honor.

For such is the Father's love to his Son, that he delights to honor all those who become his Son's faithful servants.

27. *Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour.*

There was a conflict in the Savior's heart—the weakness of his true manhood—striving with the strength of his infinite affection to his people, and also to his Father. We must never forget that "he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." If it had been no pain to him to die as the Substitute for sinners, there would have been no atoning sacrifice in his death; and if no dread had overtaken him at the thought of death, it would have proved that he did not die as we do; and, therefore, he would not have been able to take our place as he did.

28. *Father, glorify thy name.*

In the 27th verse, our Savior asked himself the question, “What shall I say?” here he gives his own answer, “Father, glorify thy name.” When you know not what to pray for, you can always safely pray, “Father, glorify thy name.” As you stand where the cross-roads meet, and you ask, “Which way shall I choose?” pray, “Father, glorify thy name.”

This incident seems like a rehearsal of Christ’s passion. Here we see that natural fear of death which came across the Savior’s mind because he was so really and truly man. If his pains had not been real pains, but had been pleasant and congenial to him, there would have been no self-sacrifice in his suffering; but the fact that they cast upon his spirit the dark shadow of death only proves to us what sharp pains they were; but instead of asking for a way of escape from them, he surrendered himself to them, gave himself up as a willing victim with this prayer upon his lips, “Father, glorify thy name.”

28. *Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.*

This was one of the three occasions on which testimony was openly borne to Christ by his Father; first at his baptism, then at his transfiguration, and now here at the rehearsal of his great sacrifice. Verily, he is the Son of God, and he is ever well-pleasing to God; and God has glorified his name, and will continue to glorify it through Jesus Christ his Son.

29. *The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him.*

We learn, from this narrative, that the voice of God is not understood by everybody. Some of those that stood by said that it thundered, and others said that an angel spake to him. It is necessary that you should be a child of God if you are to know your Father’s voice. Though God is speaking, at this moment in the clearest tones, none will recognize his voice, or understand his words, but those who are taught by his Holy Spirit.

30. *Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.*

“To make you believe that God is with me, and that I am his Son.”

31. *Now is the judgement of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out.*

See how the eye of faith reads things differently from the eye of sense. You and I would have said, “Now is Christ coming to his lowest point; now is his name to be cast out from among men, and his cause to be crushed as the result of his death.” But Christ reads the signs of the times very differently. “Now,” saith he, “in the hour of my shame, and suffering, and death, is the judgement of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” It was only by Christ being apparently conquered that Satan could be really vanquished, and there is often no way of victory for a saint except through defeat. When self is slain, then do we truly live.

32, 33. *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.*

This is the sermon, which has the Greeks for a text. They are already coming, being drawn to Christ: but when he dies, when he is lifted up upon the cross, instead of losing his attractive power, he will have greater drawing force than ever: “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”

The Pharisees said, “The world is gone after him;” but Jesus says, “No not while I am riding in state through the streets of Jerusalem; but when I am lifted up, and hung upon the cross, then shall it indeed be true, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.’” The crucified Christ of Calvary is the mighty magnet that is to attract multitudes of trembling, doubting, ruined sinners, who by grace shall be drawn unto him, and find eternal life in him.

34. *The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?*

As if it could not be true that Christ, in his divine nature, abides for ever, and yet, as Man, could be lifted up to die. It was a sneering question, “Who is this Son of

man?" Our Lord did not answer it, thus teaching us that some people are not worth answering. Instead of replying to their question, Jesus gave them a practical admonition.

35, 36. *Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.*

At first sight, this may not seem to have been an answer to their question, "Who is this Son of man?" Yet it was a very direct answer, for he was "the Light of the world;" and as the light was soon to be withdrawn from them, there was all the greater need of Christ's injunctions, "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."

These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them.

When people determine to reject Christ, he leaves them; why should he tarry where he is rejected? He "departed, and did hide himself."

37. *But though he had done so many miracles before then, yet they believed not on him.*

They had an opportunity of seeing with their eyes; what the Christ could do. He had even raised the dead in the midst of them, and yet this is the sorrowful statement.

38–40. *That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.*

These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.

This passage is very frequently quoted in the Old Testament: it was so exceedingly apropos to the condition of the unbelieving Jews. They were wilfully blinded. They could see it; they were forced to hear it; there was much that even touched their hearts; but they hardened their heart against it, and to this day they remain the same.

There is such a thing as judicial blindness. If men can see, and yet will not see, God is at last so provoked by their wickedness that he takes away the light altogether, and removes from them the very faculty of sight. It is not surprising that it should be so, for it was so with the generation in which Christ lived. They had so long rejected the true prophet—so long refused to listen to the voice of God, that, at last, he abandoned them to their own ways; and nothing worse can happen to a man than to be abandoned of God. If God casts thee off, thou art lost indeed.

42, 43. *Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.*

What a shameful thing that was! Yet you will still find that there are many persons who, even though they believe the truth, dare not own it, but must hide in obscurity until the times grow easier. However, Christ's death fetched out many who had been his disciples in secret. Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus could not keep in the background any longer and, doubtless, the thoughts of many other hearts were then revealed.

44. *Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me.*

Faith in Christ is faith in God, he that trusts the Son hath accepted the witness of the Father.

45. *And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.*

Wonderful expression. Perhaps, we never fully realize it. Christ is seeable. God is not, but when we see the Christ, we do virtually see all of God that we may desire to see: the Invisible hath made himself visible in Christ—in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

46. *I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.*

True faith in Christ sheds light on everything concerning which light is desirable. You shall understand things when you have come unto the right standpoint, when you have gotten to believe in Christ. I wonder not that those who doubt concerning him, doubt about everything; if they will not have this light, how shall they see?

47. *And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for came not to judge the world, but to save the world.*

Under this present dispensation, it is not the time of judgment. The Lord leaves you that are unbelievers to yourselves. He does not come as yet to judge you; there is a second coming, when he will be both judge and witness, and condemner, of those who have rejected him; but at present it is a dispensation of pure mercy. “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him.” There is a great God above who reckons this to be among the greatest of all human crimes, that they reject his Son. We speak of unbelief very lightly, and there are some who trifle with it as if it had no moral quality at all, but God doth not so.

48. *He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.*

Look, ye, to that, the gospel which you refuse will judge you at the last day. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ shall judge the world, saith Paul, “according to my gospel,” and he that sins against the gospel of love will certainly involve himself in the most solemn condemnation. He perishes that sins against the law, he dieth without mercy at the mouth of one or two witnesses. Of how much sorer

punishment shall he be thought worthy that sins against love, and rejects the Savior?

49. *For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.*

God at the back of Christ. Omnipotence supporting love. The expostulations of Christ, not left to our will to do as we like with them, but solemnly sanctioned by the royalties of God, so that to refute them is treason against the majesty of heaven.

Christ did not pride himself upon being a great original thinker. He took his word from his Father's mouth; and the preacher of the gospel is to be no inventor of new thoughts. The "thoughtful" man of whom we hear so much is just a man who is rebellious against God. The Lord's true servant is to repeat God's thoughts, not his own, to borrow from the Scriptures, to borrow from the teaching of the Holy Ghost, even as the Lord Jesus Christ did.

50. *And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the father said unto me, so I speak.*

If the great Head of the Church was thus only a messenger, the deliverer of a message from the Father, should not we, who at our best are such poor ministers of Christ, take heed to it that we also can say, "Even as the Father said unto me, so I speak"? God grant it!

John 13

1. *Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father,*

That is a very beautiful description of Christ's death: "His hour was that he should depart out of this world unto the Father,"—just as though he was merely going on a journey, leaving one land for another; and if this be a fair description of such a stormy passage as that of our Lord Jesus, who died for our sins upon Calvary's gross, it must with equal truth describe the death of any of the children of God. There is also an appointed time for us to depart, and to be with Christ which is far better than remaining here.

The loosing of the cable, the spreading of the sail, the crossing over the narrow sea the coming to the eternal haven, and the abiding there—what Christian heart needs to dread this? How much better is it even to look forward to it with ardent anticipation!

having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.

Think much of the abiding love of Christ: "Having loved his own"—his by election, his by redemption, for he regarded that as already done which was about to be accomplished—"Having loved his own which were in the world,"—not yet in heaven, but still in the midst of trial, still imperfect, even as you and I are—"he loved them unto the end," or "unto the perfection," as it might be rendered. The Alpha of his love, which we find in eternity, bids us believe that we shall find the Omega of it nowhere but there.

2. *And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of*

Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;

What a horrible purpose for Satan to put into the heart of Judas even in the presence of Jesus! Even where Christ himself is at the head of the table, Judas may be sitting at that same table, and Satan may then and there put into his heart the horrible purpose of betraying his Master.

3, 4. *Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; he riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.*

Notice those words, "Jesus knowing,…he took a towel, and girded himself." If he had not known how great he was, there would not have been such condescension in his action, but he knew who he was, and what the Father had entrusted to him: "The Father had given all things into his hands." You might suppose that he would rise up, in a very dignified manner, and put on a purple robe and a golden girdle, but, instead of that, he rose from the supper table, laid aside his garments, and took a towel, and girded himself. He knew that he had come forth from God, and that he was going back to God, and he performed this action on the way home to his Father. O dear brothers and sisters, if Christ thus stooped, how humble ought we to be! No office should be counted too lowly, no work for his servants should seem to be too humiliating, since Jesus "took a towel, and girded himself."

5. *After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.*

You see that Jesus does his work well. He omits none of the details of it. He puts himself in the place of a slave, and he performs a slave's duty very thoroughly. I am afraid that, sometimes, we do our work for him in a slovenly way, but Jesus was not satisfied with simply washing his disciples' fees, he must do the wiping, too. I do bless him that he did so, for this is a picture of what he has done for us. He has washed our feet, and he often repeats the gracious act. The feet that Jesus washes he will wipe; he has not begun his task without intending to finish it. I

know that he will complete in my soul the work which he has undertaken, for he fulfilled on the feet of his disciples the office he had undertaken: “He began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.”

6. *Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet?*

I do not wonder that he said that; would not you have been equally astonished had you been there? Peter had some faint idea who Christ was, he had confessed him in such a way that Jesus had said to him “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” Knowing so much about Christ, Peter did marvel at his action; he felt so astonished that he asked, “Dost thou wash my feet?”

7. *Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do those knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.*

I have heard this saying of our Lord applied to affliction; and it is very true that what Jesus does we do not at present understand, but we shall know by-and-by. I do not think, however, that this sentence is very applicable that way, for there was no affliction in having the feet washed. The fact is, though it is a very humbling thing to say, we do not understand that which Jesus does; even his simplest actions are a mystery to us. We have never gone into the very depths of them so as to comprehend them.

“What I do—even though I only wash thy feet, plain and simple operation as that is—thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.” Our knowing times, dear friends, are to come. We need not be so very anxious to know at present, this is the time of love. I would forego the filling of my head for a while if I could have my heart full; but, alas, we are generally so busy trying to attain merely head knowledge! My most intense longing is for a growing heart, a heart that truly loves the Savior. That is the way for the head to learn, for knowledge that comes by the way of the heart, and so enters the head, is the best of knowledge. Jesus said to Peter, “What I do thou knowest, not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.”

8. *Peter saith unto him, Those shalt never wash my feet.*

That is just like Peter, if John had not told us who it was that said this, we should have known that it was Peter. He was always in such a hurry, and he spoke so quickly, that he made many mistakes, yet he was always so honest and so true that his Master forgave his faults, and helped him to correct them.

We have often, in commenting, noticed Peter's fault; perhaps we have noticed that too much. Let us now notice Peter's excellence. I admire his humility in thinking it too mean an office for Christ to wash his feet; it seems to me to be a most proper feeling which prompted him to ask, "Dost thou wash my feet?" It seemed an overwhelming condescension of love which he could scarcely permit. No doubt he spoke too positively when he said to Christ "Thou shalt never wash my feet;" but, still, his motive in speaking thus was a good one. It was because he could not allow his Lord to stoop so low; he thought it ill manners to permit such an One as Christ to wash the feet of such an one as the poor fisherman, Peter.

He answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.

If Christ does not cleanse us, we do not belong to him. If he does not, day by day, exercise a purifying influence over us, we are not his.

9. *Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.*

I have already said that there was something that was not right, and yet that was perfectly natural to this "rock" disciple, and this "dove" disciple, who was such a strange mixture of boastfulness and fickleness, yet do not forget how much of good there was in him. I wish all of us were half as good as Peter. That was a grand utterance, "Wash not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." He meant, "Lord, let me have all the cleansing I can, not only such as the washing of my feet would bring, but such as the washing of my head and my hands also would bring, let me be clear of everything which would prevent full fellowship with thee, for I long to be one with thee altogether."

10. *Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.*

Then our Savior meekly, gently, quietly explained that there was no need for the washing of his head and his hands, for his whole being had already been renewed by the one great act of regeneration; and as he had been cleansed from sin by the free gift of pardon at the time when he first believed, there was no need of any repetition of the spiritual bathing, all that was required was the washing of his feet—a beautiful distinction always to be observed.

He that believeth in Christ is fully forgiven. He is like a man who has gone into the bath, and washed, but, when he steps out of the bath, and put his foot on the ground, he often soils it, so that, before he robes himself, he needs to wash his feet again. That is our condition as believers in Jesus; we are washed in his precious blood, and are whiter than snow; but these feet of ours constantly touch this defiling earth, so they need every day to be washed. Christ our Lord Jesus said to Peter, “He that it bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all.”

11. *For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean.*

They were all washed so far as their feet were concerned, but not all of them had been cleansed in the bath which removes the stains of sin.

12–15. *So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*

Christ’s actions are the pattern for us to imitate! Oh, that we followed them more closely!

16. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.*

Sometimes, we think that we are a deal too great to wash anybody's feet; we should like to see a person propose it to us, such big people as we are! If we talk like that, there is great need that we should be taken down. That would be the true way to rise in the likeness of Jesus. Oh, that we were lowlier in humility! We should be higher in grace if we were.

17. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

Peter wanted to know them; Jesus would have us do them.

18, 19. *I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen:*

Christ has a chosen people, though some will not believe it. Yet it is so, for he says, "I know whom I have chosen."

But that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.

So, you see, even the great trouble of the early Church, the betrayal by Judas, was used by Christ for the strengthening of his disciples' faith. He foretold that it would be as it came to pass. So, dear friends, in these latter days, many forsake the gospel, but Jesus told us that it would be so. He taught his servants to write that there would be a falling away, and that in these last days there would be scoffers; and as we read the prophecies, and compare them with the fulfillment, even the doleful fact itself confirms our faith in our Lord.

20. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.*

He who hears not the apostles hears not their Master. The testimony of the Holy

Ghost by apostolic lips is as sure as the testimony by the Son of God himself; and it is flat rebellion against the Holy Ghost to graduate his utterances, whether they be through prophets, apostles, or the Christ himself.

21. *When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit,*

Of that silent conflict in the Savior's heart whilst he was sitting at table no one was a spectator. Into any man's spiritual apprehensions it were beyond the power of any other creature to penetrate; how much less into the spiritual conflicts of the man Christ Jesus! No one could by any possibility have gazed upon these veiled mysteries. He seems to have sat there for a time like one in the deepest abstraction. He fought a mighty battle within himself.

and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

"One of you"—and his eyes would glance round the table as he said it—"one of you shall betray me." This saying of our Lord must have startled his disciples; they had all made great professions of affection for him, and for the most part those professions were true; but this sentence must have fallen like a bomb-shell among them: "One of you shall betray me."

22, 23. *Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.*

Jesus has still his Johns, whom he peculiarly loves. He loves Peter and Nicodemus, and Nathanael, and all of them; but still there are some who know his love more than others, live in it more than others, drink into it more than others, reflect it more than others, and become more conformed to it, and saturated with it, and perfumed with it, than others are.

24. *Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake.*

Fishermen have ways of their own of talking to one another. Peter seems to say, without the use of words, “Pray ask the Master.”

25. *He then lying on Jesus’ breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?*

John does not presume to make a guess as to the traitor’s name, but he softly says, “Lord, who is it?” He asked that question of his Lord; but he did not himself pitch upon Judas. No, he might, perhaps, have laid his suspicions upon someone else who would have been innocent. It was wise to refer the matter to the Lord.

Some say that they live very near to Jesus. It is an evil sign when men speak of their own attainments. These are the people who, in the next breath, begin to condemn others. But this is not after the manner of the beloved John.

26. *Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.*

I do not know but it is not improbable, that Judas was next at the table—John here, then Jesus, and then Judas. Very likely Judas was pretty close to the Lord; for if a man has your purse you want him near you, so as to tell him what you wish to have done with the money. So, when Jesus just turned over and gave a sop to Judas, John knew the meaning of the act.

27-30. *And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night.*

O brothers and sisters, may all of us be kept from this terrible sin! May none of us ever betray our Master after all the fellowship we have had with him! It

would be better to die for him than to deny him; and it would be better never to have been born than to have been in intimate association with him, and then to have betrayed him.

31, 32. *Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him.*

Did his joy in the prospect of what he was about to accomplish for his people swell to the very highest, just about the time when the fountains of the depths of his griefs were about to be broken up, and his spirit to be flooded in agony as he cried, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death?” O to know his joy—the joy of loving even unto death!

33-35. *Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

Our Lord’s love did not consist in the mere effervescence of transient emotion or in kind words only; but he loved them deeply, and shared all that he had with them. He even condescended to wash their feet as though he had them their servant; what more could he do for them? Yet he did far more than that, for he laid down his life for them. He gave up all he had for them; he gave up all the members of his body and all the faculties of his soul, his entire nature, that he might save his people. “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” “As I have loved you,” saith he, “even so love ye one another.” What a marvellous exposition of the precept the whole life all death of Jesus Christ make up for us! May we have the grace to follow where the path is so plainly marked out for us!

The love which Christ commands his followers to have towards one another is not the ordinary love of man to man as such, but the love of the new-born man to

the new-born man. Let us, who love the Lord, love each other fervently in that sense. This it a love which arises out of a totally new union. A man, who is a Christian, belongs to a very special family. That family circle does not comprehend the whole human race; it is a family inside the larger human family, yet separated from it by an inner spiritual life.

36-38. *Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake. Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.*

Though Peter did not really know himself, Christ knew him. That is one of our comforts—that the Lord Jesus Christ foresees all future ill, and so provides against it; he looks down into our nature, and deals with us as we need to be dealt with. It is well for us that we are in his hands.

John 14

I suppose that many of you know this chapter by heart. I notice that, in all old Christians' Bibles, this leaf is well worn—sometimes worn out. We have here our Lord's homely talk to his disciples; it is full of sublimity, yet it is blessedly simple. There is a sort of unveiling of himself in this chapter. It is not so much like a public discourse as a private conversations and this tends to make the Savior's speech appear the more condescending, and yet also the more sublime.

1. *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

There is no cure for heart-trouble but heart-trust. "Ye believe in God,"—you do trust in Divine Providence, now trust in the Savior's great atonement. You have come close to God already, come closer still to the Incarnate God, the Lord Jesus Christ; hear him say to you, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." Your faith already deals with some things; now let it deal with more things. Your past troubles have been endured by faith; now endure the present in the same way.

2. *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

This was very largely the cause of their trouble; they were fall of sorrow because their Lord and Master was going away from them; yet he was going for their good. It was with a set purpose that he was leaving them, and the same reason still keeps him away from us. We are not to mourn for him as we might for one slain in battle, who would never come back to us.

He has gone for a little while to another country, to the great Father's house, upon a most gracious and necessary errand: "I go to prepare a place for you." The Spirit of God is down here to prepare us for the place; the Son of God is up

yonder to prepare the place for us.

3. *And 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.*

And he will come again. That is our grandest hope. We are looking for his coming. It is very sweet to know that we shall be for ever with the Lord if we die before his coming; but still the hope of God's people is the coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead—his taking to himself all his redeemed to be for ever with him.

4. *And whether I go ye know, and the way ye know.*

Ye know where Christ is gone. Ye know how to get at him. The throne on which he sits is the throne of grace. He is gone to the Father, and your prayers will find the Father. You know the way. Then frequent it, and though as yet in your bodies you cannot reach to him, yet in spirit you can.

5. *Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?*

Which was a contradiction of his Master, which Thomas ought not to have uttered. He should have put it much rather in the form of a question for explanation, than of such a flat denial. His Master said, "Whither I go ye know." He said, "We know not whither thou goest." But we must take care that we do not contradict Christ. Our unbelief would be shamed out of us, if we were to look at it and examine it. I am persuaded that your faith will be justified the more you examine it, till you will discover that faith in God is nothing, after all, but sanctified common-sense. So unbelief will appear to be more shameful the more you examine it, till you discover at length that it is nothing but garish folly. An outrage upon the first principles of wisdom is distrust of God.

6. *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Christ has gone to the Father's upper house to make it ready for all the redeemed family. We could never have entered there if he had not gone in first; and even now, there is no coming to the Father in faith or in prayer except by Christ; we must not even dream of communion with God except through our Lord Jesus Christ. Luther used to say—and to say very wisely, too—"I will have nothing to do with an absolute God; I must come to God by Christ Jesus."

7. *If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also:*

For Christ is the express image of his Father's person, so that you always see the Father when you see the Son.

And from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

Thomas had made an advance in heavenly knowledge; he had taken a higher degree in divinity now that the Master had taught him so much upon this most important point: "from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him."

The best view of God we can ever have is Christ. In the person of his Son there is more seen of God than in all nature; aye and in all history added to nature. God hath given us a full-length portrait of himself in Jesus; while in all his works, we have no more then a mere miniature of him. Oh! that we knew Christ more; then should we know the Father.

8. *Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.*

What a comfort these questions and blunders of Thomas and Philip ought to be to us, for it is clear that we are not the only dolts in Christ's school; and if he could bear with them, he can bear with us also. Like them, how little do we retain of that which he teaches us! We are taught much, but we learn little, for we are such poor scholars. Our memory holds but little, and our understanding still less of what we have been taught, and we are all too apt to want something that we can see, just as Philip said, "Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us."

9. *Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet*

hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?

Is not this a homely talk between the Master and his disciples? Said I not rightly that Christ here seems to unveil and unbosom himself? He lets these children of his talk away much at their ease; and I think we ought to be at ease when we are talking with Christ. Some like a very stately service in their worship, something very grand, that makes ordinary worshippers stand afar off. Let them enjoy it if they can; but as for us, we prefer something which permits us to come very near to our Lord.

10. *Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?*

Yes, Lord, we do believe that; thine eternal and inseparable union with the Father is a doctrine about which we have no question whatsoever. Christ and the Father are indissolubly one. Even when he was here in his humiliation, he was not separated from his Father, except in that dread hour when he was bearing his people's sins upon the cross. Now he is visibly one with his Father on the throne of glory.

10. *The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.*

Notice, dear friends, that even the Lord Jesus Christ did not profess to teach doctrines out of his own mind. He says, "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself." Now, if it is so with the Master, how much more ought it to be so with the servants! But have you not noticed how it is with the great men of the pulpit in these days? It is, "What I have thought out, I make known to you." It is, "What has come to me by the spirit of the age, the culture of the period, I tell you." God save us from this kind of talk!

It is no business of mine, I know, ever to come to you merely with a message of my own; for if the Lord Jesus Christ did not do so, what a fool his servant must be if he pretends to do it! No; if it is not revealed in this Book, neither shall it be taught by us, nor ought it to be received by you. So Jesus says to his disciples, "The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself." He glories in his union

with the Father, and in the fact that he does not come as an independent teacher of thoughts of his own inventing, but he tells out to us what is in his Father-heart.

11. *Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.*

Note how the Master continued to urge his disciples to believe. Again and again he returned to that vital point: Believest thou? "Believe me…: believe me." This he did because there is no relief from heart-trouble but by believing the everlasting truth of God, and especially by believing him who is "the truth." The believer alone has true peace of heart; the unbeliever is tossed to and fro on the billows of the great ocean of doubt; how can he rest? There is nothing for him to rest upon. Happily, Christ is still saying, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" and they are truly wise who accept his gracious invitation.

12. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.*

We cannot do Christ's redeeming work; it would be blasphemy to suppose that we could, for he said of it, "It is finished." But we can do the kind of work that Christ did in instructing men, and in being the means of blessing men. Many of the apostles brought to a knowledge of the truth more souls than their Lord did by his personal ministry. He was pleased, after the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, to bring great multitudes to the faith by some of his servants, while he himself preached, comparatively speaking, to but few, only journeying up and down that little land of Palestine, and scarcely traversing all even of it. And if we will but trust him, and seek to imitate his wondrous life, we also shall do the works that he did, and do them on an even larger scale, and do them with even greater results.

13. *And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

We do not believe enough in the power of prayer. I sometimes feel staggered

when i meet with good people, undoubtedly good people, who still look upon it as a new thing that we should believe that God hears our prayers. But this is the fundamental of Christian experience. How can we live without the mercy-seat? And if that mercy-seat be nothing but a vain show, and prayer be only a pious but useless exercise, what is there in the Christian religion at all?

We have heard some very wise people say that prayer is no doubt beneficial to those who offer it; but to suppose that it has any effect upon the mind of God is absurd. Do you not see, brethren, that they think us all idiots. They must do so, for do you suppose that any but an idiot would go on praying at all if he did not believe that it had some effect upon the mind of God, and that it did prevail with God? I would as soon stand and whistle out of my bedroom window for half an hour, as I would kneel down and pray for half an hour, if there were to be no result coming from it, and so would every sensible man.

But we know of a surety that God heareth prayer. We cannot imagine our Lord deceiving us, and he must have done so if it is not so, for he says, “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

14. *If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.*

But there is a deal of praying that never reaches to the name of Christ. Even to pray for Christ’s sake does not reach to the point of praying in Christ’s name. If I go and transact business in the name of such a person, that is a different thing from merely asking to be allowed to do my own business for the sake of that person. But when you are authorized to use the name of Christ—as it were, to write his signature to your cheques—oh! what power there is in prayer at that time!

“If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.” But you cannot ask everything in that name. You are obliged to draw back from some prayers, and say, “No; Christ would never authorize me to put his name to that.” You see there is a blessed check upon the universality of prayer—a most necessary and useful check—for we would not dare to ask some things in that wondrous name.

15. *If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

We cannot expect the Holy Spirit to dwell with us unless we are obedient to the commands of Christ. Our Saviour here tells us much about the spirit of truth, but he begins with this test of our love to him: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

Obedience is the truest proof of love. Some, out of supposed love to Christ, have attempted or committed acts of fanaticism; they have been enthusiastic, and, in many cases, doubtless, very sincere; but they have also been very unwise. Here is the best thing that you can do out of love for Christ: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

16. *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;*

Not a different Comforter, but the Comforter who is now with us, is of the same nature, and works after the same manner, as the Lord Jesus himself, who was our first Advocate, Helper, Paraclete, Comforter. I give you these four words instead of one, because they are all wrapped up in the original word “Paraclete”—“that he may abide with you for ever and ever.” The Lord Jesus could not abide with us for ever, it was expedient for him that he should go to heaven to prepare a place for us. But the Holy Spirit will not go; he will remain in this dispensation, even to the end of it—“that he may abide with you for ever.”

17. *Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

Do you not notice how this verse contradicts the current thought of the period about “the spirit of the age” being so much in advance of the Spirit of all past ages? Listen again to these words of our Lord: “The Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive.” The world is always receiving one form of falsehood or another; tossed to and fro, and never abiding long in one stay, it cries, “This is the truth,” or “That is the truth,” or “Now we have it; this is the truth.” But Christ says, “The Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”

18, 19. *I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.*

"While I am away the Holy Spirit shall be your Comforter, you shall not be like orphans without father or friend." Jesus will come a second time. This is our joyful hope, but meanwhile, while he is away, we are not without a Comforter. "Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more." What a wonderful thing! The children of God always see Jesus spiritually. "But ye see me; because I live, ye shall live also." There is life in a look, and our continued sight of Christ brings us continued life through Christ. Because he lives, there is a loving, living, lasting union between us and Christ.

20. *At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.*

This is a wonderful trinity of unities, each one a mystery, but each one to be known by the believer when he is instructed of the Spirit of God: Christ in the Father, the saints in Christ, and Christ in them. He that experimentally knoweth what it is to be in Christ knoweth more than all the secular philosophers who have ever lived.

21. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*

He must have obedience. Christ cannot come and comfortably manifest himself to those who are living out of order and disregarding his words.

Take heed, children of God, of disobedience; it is a discipline of the divine family that if we disobey we should lose the comfortable presence of our Lord. "I will manifest myself to him."

22. *Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?*

Large-hearted Judas, very different from Judas Iscariot! He wants Christ to manifest himself to all the world; he seems to have been a man of very broad views. He does not comprehend discriminating love and electing grace; he wants all the privileges of the children of God to be the privileges of the King's enemies, but that cannot be.

23. *Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*

Only holy men can see the holy Christ, and it is only as we walk in obedience to him that we can have the Son of God walking with us, and the Father and the Son dwelling with us.

This is not a mere call, it is an abiding: "we will make our abode with him." God, whom the heavens cannot contain yet comes and dwells in a lowly heart, and abides with a loving spirit: "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him." There is an aroma about these words which I cannot convey to you; but if you have the spiritual nostril, you will perceive their fragrance for yourselves.

24. *He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings:*

There is much talk of loyalty to Christ, but the teachings of Christ are despised. The teachings of his apostles are the teachings of Christ; they are but a prolongation and exposition of what Christ taught. In rejecting them we reject Christ. He will not have it that we can be loyal to him and yet refuse his teaching.

and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

You see that the Lord Jesus Christ does not profess to be a great original thinker, but he speaks as the Messenger sent by the Father, and unless we also are commissioned and taught by the Father, of what value will our poor feeble thoughts be? Our only power lies in the fact that we do not utter our own

thoughts, but the truths which have been taught to us by the Holy Spirit. To some, this may look like weakness, but it is real strength.

25, 26. *These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name,*

Brethren, ought we not to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, since the Father himself does everything in that name? Even concerning the sending of the Comforter, Christ says, “whom the Father will send in my name.” Then, he would certainly have the Father and the children acting upon the same principles; the Father glorifying Christ by sending the Spirit in his name, and ourselves glorifying Christ by presenting our prayers and praises in that one adorable name.

he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

That is the teaching. The Holy Spirit does not reveal anything fresh to us. He brings to our remembrance what has already been said and written in the inspired Word. Whereas the Book conveys to us the outward sense, the Holy Ghost conveys to us the inner meaning. The embodiment of truth you have in this Book, but the truth itself, dealing with the conscience, and heart, and spirit must be lad home by the Author of the Book, by the Holy Ghost himself.

27. *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

He had given them peace while he was with them. His divine presence had been their continual comfort; but now, although he was going away from them, he would leave his peace behind him as the most precious legacy that he could bequeath to them: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.”

28. *Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again*

unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

The Lord Jesus had taken a subordinate place, he had become the servant of the Father, the messenger for the Father, but he was going back to reassume his glory. That ought to be a subject of joy to us. Let us bless Jesus that he is not here. If he were here in his former state he would be in his humiliation; but now he has gone to his glory. Let us rejoice in this.

29. *And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe.*

Jesus warned his disciples of all that was to happen in his death and in his departure. I believe that the Spirit of God often gives inward warnings to God's people of troubles that are to come—premonitions, so that they may be prepared for the trouble when it comes, and may feel as if he had told them before it came to pass.

30. *Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me.*

His words must come to an end, for he was going to perform his mightiest deeds. He could converse no longer, for he was going from converse to conflict. He must meet his great enemy now and leave his dearest friends.

31. *But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do, Arise, let us go hence.*

And he went to his death bravely determined to do the Father's will, though it meant the drinking up of that bitter cup, which made his very soul to tremble within him. God give us such love to Christ as Christ had to the Father.

John 15

This chapter contains some of the choicest of the utterances of the Lord Jesus to his disciples. On his way from the upper room in Jerusalem, where he had instituted the supper, to the garden of Gethsemane, where he was about to be betrayed, he spoke these wondrous words of cheer and counsel.

1. *I am the true vine,*

Many questions have been raised about which is the true Church; the Savior answers them, “I am the true vine.” All who are united, really united, to the ever-living Savior are members of the true Church. Find ye them where ye may, if they are one with Christ, they are his—they are parts of the divine vine; they are belonging to his Church.

And my Father is the husbandman.

It is the Father’s province, by the Holy Spirit and by the works of Providence, to see to the prosperity of the Church. “My Father is the husbandman.” All preachers, all teachers, are but, so to speak, the pruning tool in the hand of the great vine-dresser. “My Father is the husbandman.”

2. *Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away*

It is a necessary part of vine-dressing to remove the superfluous shoots. Too much wood-making, which does not lead to fruit-bearing, is but a waste of strength. And so in the Church there are those that bear no fruit, and for a while they appear to be fresh and green, and they who are the under-vine-dressers dare not take them away. But the Father does it—sometimes by removing them by death; at other times by permitting them openly to expose their own character,

until they are then amenable to the discipline of the Church, and are removed.

and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

The vine is very apt to become unclean and unhealthy; there are all sorts of creatures that love to suck its juices, so that even the most fruitful bough needs to be cleansed. Besides, the vine has a great tendency to run to wood, so the pruning-knife must be used very sharply. It will be used upon all who are really in Christ, and who are abiding in Christ.

Are you suffering under the pruning-knife just now? Accept it joyfully. How much better that the knife should cut off your superfluities than that it should cut you off! The mercy is that, although God will purge and prune his vine-branches, he will not destroy them.

3. *Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.*

While Christ was with his disciples he kept his vine continually pruned by the word which he spoke. That word cut off the non-fruit-bearing branches, for we read that after that saying there were some that went back, and walked no more with him, for they said, "'This is a hard saying; who can bear it?" That was the word pruning off the useless branches. And there were others who were grieved by his word. These, were good people, and it did them good. It was a godly sorrow that led to bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.

The Word is often the knife with which the great Husbandman prunes the vine; and, brothers and sisters, if we were more willing to feel the edge of the Word, and to let it cut, away even something that may be very dear to us, we should not need so much pruning by affliction. It is because that first knife does not always produce the desired result that another sharp tool is used by which we are effectually pruned.

4. *Abide in me, and I in you.*

The pruning is nothing without the abiding in Christ. You may suffer again and

again; but no good can come of it except you have vital, continuous, everlasting union with Christ. You cannot take a branch away from the vine for a little while, and then put it back again; its life depends upon the perfect continuity of its union. So is it with us and Christ: the branch is in the vine, and the vine is in the branch.

As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

It is not a transient faith, it is not saying, “I was converted so many years ago;” but it is a living faith, an abiding faith, a constant vital union with Christ that marks the true heir of heaven.

5. *I am the vine, ye are the branches:*

You are not the vine; do not think that you are; and if God blesses you, and makes you of some importance in the Church, yet do not dream that you are the Church, that you are the very root and stein of it. Ah, no! at the utmost, “ye are the branches.”

he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit:

Oh, what a searching word is this! Are we bringing forth much fruit? I trust, dear brethren, that we are bringing forth some fruit; but, oh! what a test is this, “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” Christ expects much from those who have this doubly high privilege of having him in them, and of being themselves in him.

for without me ye can do nothing.

Not merely will you do very little, but you can do nothing at all if you are severed from Christ. You are absolutely and entirely dependent upon Christ both for your life and for your fruit-bearing. Do we not wish to have it so, beloved? It is the incipient principle of apostasy when a man wishes to be independent of

Christ in any degree, when he says, “Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me that I may have something in hand, some spending money of my own.” No; you must, from day to day, from hour to hour, and even from moment to moment, derive life, light, love, everything that is good, from Christ. What a blessing that it is so!

6. *If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*

And are there sufficient of them for that? It is enough to bring tears into one’s eyes to think that there should be enough fruitless, unabiding, merely nominal members of Christ to pay for gathering up to make a fire. Oh, sad, sad thing is this! It is the grief of the Church, it is the sorrow of God’s ministers, it ought to call for great self-examination in our own hearts that mere professors, those who apostatize after having made a profession of religion, do not seem to have been thought by the Savior to be here and there one, but to be so many that “men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.”

7. *If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you,*

You see that doctrinal vitality is necessary to true union to Christ. Some, in these days, talk about a spiritual attachment to the person of Christ, while they shoot their envenomed darts against the dogmas of Christ; but that will not do. “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you,”—my words of doctrine, precept, or promise, then”—

ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Do not take that verse as a promise of unlimited answers to prayer, for it is nothing of the kind. Remember the “if” that qualifies it: “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you,” for a man who is truly in Christ, as the branch is in the vine, and who is feeding upon Christ’s words, will be so influenced by the Holy Spirit that he will not ask anything which is contrary to the mind of God. Consequently, his prayers, though in one sense unrestricted, are really restricted by the tenderness of his conscience, and the sensitiveness of his spirit to the

influence of the mind of God.

There are some Christians who do not get their prayers answered, and who never will as long as they do not comply with this condition, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you.” If you do not take notice of Christ’s words, he will not take notice of your words. He is not going to open his door to every stranger who chooses to give a runaway knock at it, but he will pay attention to his own children who pay attention to him.

8. *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.*

You shall be known to be the disciples of the much fruit-bearing Savior. He was no moderately good man, he was not one who was only a little useful in the world; but our blessed Master was perfectly consecrated, he abounded in every good word and work; and unless we are the same, how shall men think that we are his disciples?

9. *As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you:*

As truly as the Father loves the Son, so truly does Jesus love us; nay, more than that, in the same manner as the Father loved the Son—that is, without beginning, without cessation, without change, without end, without measure—so does Jesus love us. There are many great texts in the Bible, but I have often questioned whether there is a bigger text than this—a vaster abyss of meaning shall can be found in these few words, “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you.”

continue ye in my love.

Abide in it, live in it as the fish lives in the stream, enjoy it, do nothing contrary to it.

10. *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father to commandments, and abide in his love.*

I said just now that the doctrinal words of Christ were to be regarded by us. So, dearly-beloved, the precepts or commands of God must ever be regarded. It is an idle tale for men to talk of a mythical visionary love to Christ which does not result in obedience to his will. We must keep his commandments, or we cannot truly say to him, “Thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.”

11. *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*

If Christ is not pleased with us, we cannot be glad; and if he has no joy in us, we cannot have joy in him. These two things rise and fall together. When the father of the family looks with joy upon his boy, then the boy is happy; but when the father has no joy in his son, then be sure of this, the son has no joy in his father, but he is sad at heart. O God, may we never grieve thee, for if we do, we shall be ourselves grieved; at least, I trust that we shall, we would not have it otherwise. But, oh! that we light have the testimony that Enoch had before his translation, that we have pleased God! Then shall we have true pleasure in ourselves.

12. *This is my commandment, That ye love one another as I have loved you.*

Are you doing this, brethren and sisters in Christ, really loving one another? Do you never pick holes in each other’s character? Do you never judge a fellow-Christian harshly? If you do these things, chide yourself, and cease from this evil habit at once, for your Lord says to you, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.”

13. *Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

What more has he that he can lay down when, having given up all else, he gives life itself for them?

14. *Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*

Obedience, then, is rewarded with a holy friendship, for Christ becomes in the highest sense our Friend; but we are not his friends till we cease to delight in sin, and turn away from it into the paths of holiness.

15. *Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.*

The law made man do this and that, but it communicated very little of the secret counsels of God; but there is a holy familiarity between Christ and his people, a sacred confidence which Christ has manifested towards us in revealing the very heart of God to us, and therefore we are put upon a very high standing, not as servants now, but as friends. O friends of Christ, show yourselves friendly by your entire obedience to his gracious will!

16. *Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,*

"That is where the love began—not with you, but with me." No sinner is beforehand with God, but God's prevenient grace outruns the sinner's first desire; yea, grace comes to dead souls when as yet they are not capable of a right emotion.

and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain:

There are some people who are very fond of quoting the first part of this verse, they are very glad to hear a sermon upon the free, sovereign grace of God. They cannot too often repeat the words, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you;" but they do not talk so much about the next clause: "and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." Let us accept all God's words as he has given them to us, and keep up the due proportion of the whole.

Note that Christ is not speaking here of spasmodic piety, the religion that can only be kept up by popular preaching, and great meetings, and much excitement, and all that sort of thing; but of the religion of principle that bears its clusters

tomorrow as well as today, and even months and years hence—the religion that bears its fruit every month, and the leaf whereof doth not wither. May we be such branches in the true vine that our fruit shall thus remain.

That whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

For, where the fruit remains, power in prayer will remain. If we are constantly living unto God, we shall find ourselves privileged to have the ear of God; and when we pray to him, he will grant us the desire of our hearts.

17. *These things I command you, that ye love one another.*

As if there were many things in one in that command. It is but one command, but it is so comprehensive that all the commandments are fulfilled in this one: "that ye love one another."

18. *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.*

That is what you have reason to expect, and you may feel honored if they treat you as they have treated your Lord.

19. *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*

Therefore expect it, in some form or other, for you will be sure to meet with it. The seed of the serpent never will love the seed of the woman.

20. *Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.*

It ought to be quite sufficient for the servant if he is treated as his Lord was;

what higher honor than that could he wish to have?

21, 22. *But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.*

"If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin,"—as if all the rest would scarcely have been sin at all in comparison with that sin against the light which men committed after Christ had spoken to them.

There is an awful increase of sin produced by Christ appearing to a man; and if any of you have been very near to the Kingdom, and your conscience has been aroused, and your mind has been impressed by the truth, and yet you have gone back to your sin, you have multiplied that sin a thousandfold. The times of your ignorance God may have winked at; but now you are sinning against light and knowledge; and unless you repent, terrible will be your doom.

23. *He that hateth me hateth my Father also.*

There is a hatred of God in all hatred of the Mediator. Men may say that they love God, and yet despise Christ, but it cannot be so. Christ is so truly God, and so clear a manifestation of God, that, if men knew God, they would certainly hate him if they hate Christ.

24. *If I had not done among them the works which none other man did they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father.*

Our Lord did not mean that they would have been sinless if he had not come to them, but that his coming, and their rejection of him, had enormously increased and intensified their sinfulness.

25. *But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.*

They fulfilled what had been written long before, even as they afterwards did when they put Christ to death.

26. *But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:*

Notice that blessed truth—that even that Divine Person, the Holy Ghost, when he comes to visit us, has nothing better to speak of than our Lord Jesus Christ: "He shall testify of me." Even the Holy Spirit, when he exercises the function of the Comforter, testifies of Christ.

27. *And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.*

The witness of the Spirit of truth still continues, and Christ's disciples are still privileged to be co-witnesses, even with the Holy Spirit himself; let us take care to avail ourselves of this privilege whenever we can. May we all bear witness according as we have been with Christ, for there is no bearing witness to Christ unless we have first been with him.

John 16

This chapter contains some of the most precious words that the Lord Jesus uttered before he died upon the cross.

1. *These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.*

That you should not be scandalized when you are put to suffering on any account —that you should not dread the offense of the cross, and turn aside because of it. How considerate our Master is! It seems as if he might be angry at us if he suspected that we could be offended by anything that he did or suffered, or that we had to suffer for him; but he knows the weakness of our flesh, and, therefore, he speaks with so much elaboration of comfort.

2. *They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.*

That terrible "time" did come very soon, and the Jewish and other persecutors hunted down the Christians in almost every place where they could be found. Nothing would satisfy their cruel foes but the blood of multitudes of martyrs, and many of the persecutors actually thought that they were doing God service while they were putting his children to torture and death.

3. *And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.*

It is ignorance that makes men hate God's people and his Son. Truly did Paul say, "I did it ignorantly in unbelief;" and for such persecutors there is full and free forgiveness. When they turn unto the Lord, even this sin shall be forgiven them; but they will not forgive themselves for having committed it; and, like

Paul, they will count themselves the chief of sinners because they persecuted the Church of God.

4. *But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them.*

Christ did not deceive his disciples concerning the treatment that would be meted out to them. He did not promise that the road to heaven would be an easy path, or flatter his followers with the notion that the cross, which they had to carry after him, had no weight in it.

And these things I said not unto you at the beginning because I was with you.

While they had his presence, he was like a wall of fire round about them. They did not need to be protected then from dangers which not come. And the Lord has not told us yet some of the things which he will reveal to us by and by, because the trial has not come. You feel as if you could not die at peace just now. You dread death. You shall have dying grace in dying moments. Do not be questioning yourself as to whether you have got dying grace now. You do not want it yet. You shall have it when the time comes.

5. *But now I go my way to him that sent me;*

Christ was going to the cross, and to the grave, and afterwards to heaven.

and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?

For want of asking that question, Christ's disciples were full of grief. Sometimes we do not ask enough questions. We ask too many questions of doubt; it would be well if we were to ask a few more questions of believing curiosity. There are some things that we ought to wish to know; and Christ encourages his people to come to him for information.

6. *But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled*

your heart.

They were thinking more of their loss by his going away from them than of his gain in going back to his Father. If they had thought of the glory into which he was so soon to enter, they would have ceased to sorrow, and would have rejoiced with exceeding joy, but they seem to have loved themselves better than they loved their Lord; hence his absence, which ought to have given them many reasons for rejoicing, became to them a cause for grief.

7. *Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away:*

"It is not merely for my own glory that I am going away, but my absence from you will be better for you than my continued bodily presence with you could possibly be."

For if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

"And he will be of more service to you than I could be even if I were to remain with you." The presence of the Spirit of God in the Church is better for the present dispensation than even the bodily presence of Christ would be.

8. *And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:*

What, a Comforter reprove? Yes. The Holy Spirit never comforts till he has reproved. There must be a reproof of sin before there can be comfort in Christ. And while the Spirit comforts saints, he reproves the world.

9. *Of sin, because they believe not on me;*

The greatest sin in all the world is not believing on Jesus. Our Lord did not say, "Of sin, because of the evil of drunkenness." That is a great sin, a cursed sin, and there are other great sins; but Christ said, "Of sin, because they believe not on

me.” That is the root sin, the foundation sin, the sin that keeps a man in his sin.

10. *Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more;*

It is God’s righteousness that takes Christ up to heaven. He has been here; he has lived a perfect life; he has died a sacrificial death; and God has shown his acceptance of him, for he has gone to his reward.

11. *Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.*

Christ has already judged the prince of the powers of evil, so you may depend upon it that he will also judge all those who are under the dominion of the traitor prince who has usurped his Master’s position and authority. Christ has summoned the dread lord of evil to his bar, and judged him.

12. *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.*

Here again observe the reticence of the Savior for his disciples’ good, still graciously keeping from them what they could not bear to hear; and are not you, beloved, thankful that you do not, at this moment, know what is to happen to you in the future? It is wise for each one of us to say—

> “My God, I would not wish to read
> My fate with curious eyes;—
> What gloomy lines are writ for me,
> Or what bright scenes arise.”

It is best for you, at present, to know but little. Prize what you do know, and be content to leave all that is not yet revealed, for “the secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever.”

13. *Howbeit when he the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into an truth: for he shall not speak of himself;*

This is a very wonderful expression: “He shall not speak of himself.” We have plenty of men, nowadays, who boast that they do speak of or from themselves; that is to say, they profess to borrow from no one, not even from God. They are original thinkers, inventors, they bring forth fresh things out of the depth of their wonderful minds; but even the Holy Ghost is here said not to “speak of himself.”

But whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak;

That is just our business, to hear God’s message, and then to speak it and if the Holy Ghost does this, and if Jesus did it, we also may be glad to do the same. We are no inventors of great novelties, we are simply the message-bearers of the Most High, the declarers of the old truths which God has revealed to us.

14, 15. *He shall glorify me:*

Now that is a sure mark of the Holy Spirit. If there be any spirit which does not glorify Christ, it is not the Holy Spirit; it is not the Comforter. If you hear any doctrine which detracts from the dignity of Christ’s nature, from the glory of Christ’s person, from the perfection and the necessity of Christ’s sacrifice, you may depend upon it that it is not the doctrine of God. Reject it at once. It may poison you. It cannot build you up. “He shall glorify me.”

For he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

The things of the Father are Christ’s. We learn them us Christ’s. The Spirit brings them to us as Christ’s, and so Christ is glorified, and we are comforted.

16. *A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.*

This is what our whole life is: “a little while.” But in that little while there are little whiles of sadness, and little whiles of gladness—little whiles in which we have Christ with us, and little whiles in which we see him, but find him not.

Blessed be God, we are going away from the land of these changing little whiles up to the place where the sun shineth in its strength for ever and ever.

How wonderful this is! We are to see Jesus because he has gone to the Father. It looks as if that were a reason why we should not see him, but we see him better, by faith, now that he has gone to the Father, than we could have seen him while he was here below covered with the veil of his humiliation. Yet it is hardly surprising that the disciples were puzzled by their Lord's words: "A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me:" and, "Because I go to the Father."

17. *Then said some of his disciples among themselves,*

They said this "among themselves." This was not a wise course, for what can ignorance learn of ignorance? Here were disciples questioning one another; none of them knew anything, and yet they were trying to teach one another. If they had all gone to their Master, how much more quickly would they have understood his words!

Take everything to Jesus. Try everything by the Word of God. Do not believe what you hear because I say it, or because somebody else says it. Go to the Word of God to learn what you need to know, and to the Spirit of God to teach you the meaning of what you read.

What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and, again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?

It was only too plain. We often do not understand our Master because we imagine that there is some deep significance in his words when their meaning lies upon the very surface. If you would understand the gospel as you understand the common talk of life, it would be wise. If we could but bring men to believe God as a child believes its mother, practically and really, then their salvation would be a very simple and speedy matter.

18. *They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we*

cannot tell what he saith.

Then why not ask him? But are not you and I often very slow to ask the meaning of the Master's words? You read in Scripture something that you cannot understand, and you say to yourself, "I cannot make out the meaning of that chapter;" but do you always pray over it, and ask the Writer to tell you what he intended when he wrote it? It is a grand thing to have this Inspired Book, and it is a grander thing still to have the Spirit of God, who inspired it, abiding with his people for ever; but we fail to learn many a secret from the Word because we do not pray our way into it. He who does not know can scarcely have his ignorance pitied when it remains willful; if you can know for the asking, why not ask?

19. *Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me?*

They might have inquired a long while among themselves, and all in vain; but to go to their Lord was the short way out of the difficulty, for he could explain it. See how ready he is to explain, for he expounds the truth even to those who had not asked for an exposition. In this matter, he was found of them that sought him not. Knowing that they were desirous to ask, he accepted the will for the deed, the wish for the prayer; and he answered the secret longing of their heart.

20. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament,*

Christ would die; he would go away and be unseen. On the cross he would depart out of this life; in the tomb he would be hidden from his disciples: "Ye shall weep and lament."

But the world shall rejoice:

Sometimes the world appears to have the best of it. Its mouth is full of laughter while the child of God cannot speak for sorrow. Ah! well, there is time enough for a change. We may very well let those laugh today who will have to gnash their teeth for ever. Judge not God by your present circumstances. Take the

rough with the smooth. Be willing to go to heaven up the bleak side of the hill.

and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.

Not merely shall your sorrow be taken away, but it shall be transformed. As the alchemist thought that he turned baser metal into gold, so in very truth by a heavenly alchemy does Christ turn the sorrow of his people not in this case only, but in many others, into joy.

21. *A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.*

So, when Christ came back again, they would remember no more the sorrow of their travail hour in which they saw him bound, and spat upon, and taken off to execution, and mocked upon the tree. The joy that would come of it all would obliterate the remembrance of the sorrow.

22. *But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.*

The joy that comes by sorrow in connection with Christ is the joy of which we shall never be bereaved. Let us thank God that there is a joy which no man can take away. Happy are they who have it.

23, 24. *And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name:*

You have not been bold enough. You have asked a few petty things, but you have never fully made use of Christ's name. How many Christians have never learned to pray in the name of Christ! They say at the end of their petition, "For Christ's sake." That is good as far as it goes. I may ask a man to give me such and such a thing for the sake of another; that is good pleading so far as it goes. But if I dare to use the authority that my friend gives me to put his name at the bottom of my

request, that is another and a higher thing. To ask in the name of Christ, to plead under his authority, this is to pray indeed.

ask, and ye shall, receive,

They had asked very little, and they had never asked even that little in Christ's name; and there are but few Christians who do so even now. They ask for Christ's sake, which is a good plea, but to ask in Christ's name is better still—when you feel conscious that you have Christ's authority to use his name, and so can put the King's own signature at the bottom of your petitions. There are some prayers to which a man dares not to set Christ's seal; but when the prayer is such that Christ himself might have offered it, then we may present it in his name, and we may be certain that we shall receive what we have asked.

that your joy may be full.

See how our Lord continues to drive at that point, for he would have his people happy. He wants you, beloved, to be joy-full—full of joy; not merely to have a little joy hidden away in a corner somewhere, but "that your joy may be full."

25-27. *These things have spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:*

Though that be true,

For the Father himself loveth you,

That is a very precious truth. While Jesus does pray the Father for us, yet we are not to look upon that as if Christ's prayer made the Father love us. It is an exposition and display of the Father's love; and the prayer of Christ, though blessedly useful, does not make the Father love us, or willing to grant the request. "For the Father himself loveth you."

Because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

Notice the blessed condescension of Christ that he should mention his people's virtues. He says to these men that had been with him, who really do not seem as if they had loved him very much, and certainly were not very strong in faith, but were often in such a state of unbelief that he had to say, "Where is your faith?" Yet he says, "The Father himself loveth you because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God."

28. *I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.*

Here are four unfathomable depths: "I came forth from the Father,"—there is Christ's eternal pre-existence. "And am come into the world,"—there is his incarnation. "Again, I leave the world,"—there is his death, resurrection, and ascension into the glory of God. "And go to the Father,"—there is his exaltation to the Father's right hand."

29. *His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb.*

Did you never, when reading the Bible, come across a text, that was opened up to you so sweetly that you cried out just as these disciples did, "Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb?"

30. *Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.*

One does not see any reason why they should have been made so strong in faith just then. But we were not there to hear Christ's words. There is many a message, which depends upon the tone and manner of the speaker for its influence over the people who hear it. When you read the story afterwards, without the earnest manner and the living tone of the speaker, you do not see

why it had such a strange effect upon his hearers. So we do not quite see here, by the calm reading of this narrative, why the disciples leaped all of a sudden into such confidence.

31. *Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?*

He did not feel so sure of their faith as they did. We often think we have great heaps of the gold of faith; and it glitters very brightly, but it is not the precious metal after all. So Jesus said, “Do ye now believe?”

32. *Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shalt leave me alone:*

These poor creatures, who were so bold and so oversure, would all be runaways. If persecution were to arise in our day, I wonder how many of us would be found true men. Ah! you think you are true blue; but you would run at the first touch of water, not to mention fire. Are there not many of us who are but poor believers? If our faith were sharply tried, would it stand the test?

and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.

How gloriously is that blessed truth put in just here! The awful solitude that Christ was about to pass through can hardly be understood by us. It was not only that every friend forsook him, but that there was not under heaven a single person who could sympathize with him. He was going through deeps that no other could ever fathom, he was to bear griefs which no other could ever bear. Ye may indeed sip of his cup, but ye can never drink it to its dregs as he did. Ye may be baptized with his baptism; but into the depths of the abyss of woe into which he was immersed, ye cannot come. “Alone! Alone!” Never was there a human being so much alone as was the man Christ Jesus in that dread hour; and yet he says, “I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” O brave Master, make us also brave! May we be willing to stand alone for thy sake, and to feel that we are never so little alone as when we are alone with thee!

33. *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have*

peace.

Your Lord wants you to have peace. Come, then, ye tried ones, ye who are tossed about with a thousand troublous thoughts, it is your Master’s wish and will that ye should have peace.

In the world ye shall have tribulation:

You have found that true, have you not? Perhaps you are finding it true just now: “In the world ye shall have tribulation.”

But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

And in that overcoming he has conquered for you also, and he guarantees to you the victory in his name.

John 17

Can there be found, in all the records of mankind, in all the documents that have ever been preserved, anything that can match this record of our Saviour's great intercessory prayer? He seems to pray here as if he stood already within the veil; not pleading in agony as he did in the garden of Gethsemane, but speaking with that authority with which he is clothed now that his work on earth is done. There is as much of the divine as of the human in this prayer, and it is remarkable that in it our Lord does not make any confession of sin on account of his people. He does not come before God here, as it were in forma pauperis, with many pleas, but the burden of his prayer is that he may be glorified, and that his Father may be glorified in him. The words of the prayer are amongst the most simple that could have been selected, but oh, the depths that lie hidden beneath them! I do not think that, this side of heaven, any of us can know to the full the meaning of this wondrous chapter. May the Holy Spirit graciously grant us a glimpse of the glorious truths that are here revealed!

1. *These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come;*

The hour to which he had so long looked forward, the hour which he had anticipated with ardent desire: "The hour is come." On the very night that Jesus prayed this prayer, Luke's record tells us, "When the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." So he began his great intercessory prayer, "Father, the hour is come—

glorify thy Son; that thy Son also may glorify thee:

Christ's great intercessory prayer begins with his appeal to his Father to glorify his Son. Christ knew all that he would have to suffer during that "hour" to which

he had looked forward from eternity, but his eye could see, beyond the cross with all its shame, the crown with all its glory. The Son being glorified, he would also glorify his Father, and there is a wondrous glory that comes to the Father through the death of his Son upon the cross.

2. *As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.*

Notice the doctrine of this verse. Here is the mention both of a general and a particular relation to Christ. “Thou hast given him power over all flesh.” Never think of setting a limit to the value of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, never dream that you can understand all its influences and all its bearings; by his death, Christ has power over all flesh. But notice also the special purpose and object of redemption, observe how it applies particularly to the elect of God. The motive for the Father’s giving to Christ power over all flesh is this, “that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.”

3. *And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*

See how he puts himself side by side with God as no mere man might dare to do. Only he who was equal with the Father could venture to plead thus, claiming power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him. Here we learn that it is eternal life to know God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

4. *I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*

Here our Savior speaks by anticipation. He foresaw that he would pass through his passion, that all the work of his people’s redemption would be fully accomplished, and in this his final prayer on earth to the Father he could truly say, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

5. *And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the*

glory which I had with thee before the world was.

After the finished work, Christ was to have the glory. O worker for God, seek not glory before thy work is done! Expect not honor among men because thou hast begun the work so earnestly; plod on until it is finished, then shall the glory come. “Verily I say unto you, they have their reward,” said our Lord concerning the scribes and Pharisees who sought the praise of men; but you have not your reward at present, it is yet to come. Wait for it, for it is sure to come.

6. *I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world:*

They had not all of them clearly seen that manifestation. Jesus had to ask the question, “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?” Still, that was not the fault of the manifestation; Christ had manifested the name—that is, the character—of God unto those who had been given to him out of the world.

thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

What high praise this was of Christ’s disciples! “They have kept thy word.” Poor creatures that they were, they often turned aside from the right path, they were oftentimes very ignorant, and very wilful, yet the Lord knew that their hearts were right towards him, and that they willed to learn, and desired to believe. So he saw in them what was often hidden even from themselves, and he testified to his Father, “They have kept thy word.”

7. *Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.*

The Father gives Christ the truth which Christ gives to as. The Father gives Christ the souls which Jesus keeps until the day of his power. There is mutual communion between God the Father and his blessed Son; let us never say a word that might look as if we did not understand the oneness— the everlasting and

infinite oneness—which there is between the sacred persons of the Divine Unity.

8. *For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.*

He is looking at them in contrast with the world which utterly rejected him; in contrast with that world, the disciples had received and known Christ. Oh, what a blessed distinction does the grace of God make between men!

We were all blind by nature; and now that we see, it is because the sacred finger of Christ hath touched our eyes, and opened them. Let him have all the glory of it; yet let us note how well he speaks of his people.

9. *I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.*

In this, our Lord's last great intercessory prayer, he was especially engaged in petitions for his own people. There is a sense in which he intercedes for all mankind; but in the higher and more special sense referred to in this verse, Christ's own chosen ones occupied all his thoughts.

10. *And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.*

I can understand a man saying to God, "All mine are thine;" but no man, unless he is something more than man, dares to say to God, "Thine are mine." But Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, gives all that he has to God, and all that God has belongs to him, so that he can truly say, "All mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them."

11. *And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee.*

And now they are left. Their great guardian and protector has gone. They have

no visible Head left. “I am no more in the world, but these are in the world.” You and I know that we are in the world. The world makes us know that. We are in an enemy’s country. We are in a land which is not our rest; and however happy our portion may be in Christ, the world takes care that we should understand that we are aliens and foreigners in it; hurrying through it towards our abiding home.

11. *Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me that they may be one as we are.*

Do all that you can, beloved, to promote the unity of the people of God, not only on the larger scale, wherein all churches shall be brought together in loving accord, but also on the smaller scale among your own friends, and those Christian brethren who are in your own church. Let none of us break the concord. Oh! may we always be of a gentle, generous, Christlike spirit, that we may be one, as the Father is one with the Son.

12. *While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.*

What a blessed Shepherd is this who never lost a sheep! Judas crept in among the flock, but he never was truly one of the flock. He was never a son of God, he was “the son of perdition” all along. Christ has kept all his sheep, and all his lambs; and he will do the same, dear friends, even to the end.

13. *And now come I to thee;*

Christ looked beyond all that was to happen to him before he could return to his glory, and as he saw his Father waiting to welcome him, he cried “And now come I to thee.” These might be appropriate words in the mouth of a dying believer: “And now come I to thee.”

And these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

What an unselfish Savior! His heart is ready to break with his impending sufferings, and yet he prays for us, that we may be filled with his joy. I suppose that it is true that the Man of sorrows was the happiest man who ever lived. “For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame;” and, notwithstanding his boundless and bottomless grief, yet there was within him such communion with God, and love to men, and the certainty of his ultimate triumph, that kept him still joyous above the seas of tribulation. He prays that that same joy may be fulfilled in us; may God graciously grant it to all of us who believe in Jesus!

14. *I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

Never did anyone more thoroughly mix with men than Christ did, and never had anyone greater sympathy with human beings than he had, yet everyone knows that he never was “of the world.” He was distinct from all who were round about him, and he says that his disciples were as he was: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” Christ’s people have a life that others have not; they have a relationship to God that others have not, they are swayed by motives which others understand not; and they are journeying onward toward a perfection to which others do not even desire to attain. So they are not of the world, and the world treats them as speckled birds, and hates them even as it hated their Lord and Master.

15. *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil.*

Christ did not pray that his disciples should be taken out of the world. It is very seldom that we ought to present such a petition. If that had been a proper prayer for us to offer, it would have been authorized by the Master. There are times when, in great pain of body, or in deep depression of spirit, the believer, like Elijah under the juniper tree, requests for himself that he may die. If you ever do pray such a prayer, utter it very softly, for the Master does not authorize it, and that is a matter that must be left to the Lord of life and death.

Jesus says here, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” Sin is the real evil of the world; the

danger of our being entangled in worldly customs, or dropping into the evil ways of an ungodly generation. Christ prays that we may be kept from the evil that is in the world; and we also may and must pray that the Lord will keep us from the evil by which we are surrounded, and especially from the evil one who seeks our destruction.

16. *They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

Jesus puts twice over this most special and important fact, which we must never forget: “They are not of the world.” Let us never live as if we were of the world; but where such a vivid distinction has been made, God grant that there may be an equal distinction in our lives! Now comes the prayer for sanctification.

17. *Sanctify them through thy truth:*

What! Do they need to be sanctified? They are not of the world, and are kept from the evil in the world; do they need to be sanctified? Yes, we shall always need sanctifying until we reach our heavenly home, where sin cannot enter. Every day we need the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit to lead us unto holiness.

thy word is truth.

We cannot afford to give up God’s inspired Word, because it is a means of our sanctification; and if this be taken away, it is not such-and-such a dogma, as they call it, put into the background, but it is truth that would sanctify us which is discarded, it is God’s own Word that is flung to the dogs; and that must never be.

18. *As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.*

They are sent ones, even as Christ was the Sent One. As he is the Christ, they are Christians, anointed with the same anointing as he himself is, and they should endeavor to be in all respects missionaries to the world, even as Christ was God’s great Missionary to the lost.

19. *And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.*

Christ sets himself apart for us, that they may set us apart for him. Have you realized this—that you are dedicated to Christ—that every breath you breathe, and thought you think, and word you speak, and act you do, should all be done as unto him? He lived alone for you. Live alone for him.

20. *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;*

And so his blessed arm encircled not only the converts gathered to him by his own personal ministry, but also those who should, in after days, be converted under his servants' ministry; and it always seems to me to have been great condescension on his part to have said, "I pray for them also which shall believe on me through their word." We should have expected that he would have said, "through my word;" and, indeed, it is his Word that leads sinners to repent and to believe; yet Christ puts this honor upon those who speak his Word out of the fullness of their hearts. They have by experience made it their own, so he calls it theirs, and gives them this honorable position as the messengers of the gospel of salvation.

21. *That they all may be one*

That is the great prayer of Christ. There are not two churches, but one Church. Christ is not the Head of two bodies, he hath but one mystical body. There is but one Bridegroom, and there is but one bride—that bride is his indivisible Church. Hence his prayer, "That they all may be one;"—

As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Can the world believe in Christ till his Church becomes more manifestly one? I fear not, so let us each one aim at the true unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ. There are come who aim at this by separating themselves from

everybody else, but I do not see how they promote unity in that way. I clearly and painfully see how they increase divisions and multiply strife wherever they go. But let us, beloved, to the utmost of our power, promote the unity of the body of Christ.

22. *And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:*

Unity is the glory of the Church of Christ. It shall be the very crown of the Church of the living God; and when she puts it on, then will the wondering world acknowledge and accept her Lord.

23. *I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me.*

This is a wonderful expression. Does the Father love his people as he loves Christ? Then his love to them must be without beginning, without change, without measure, without end. Oh, it would ravish your heart, it would carry you away to the very heaven of heavens, if you could get the full meaning of this expression, “and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me”!

24. *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 then lovedst me before the foundation of the world.*

He will not be in glory, and leave me behind him. He is a bridegroom that cannot be satisfied unless his bride be a partaker of all his joy. He is so one with us, that as the head can never be content to be crowned, and the rest of the body be disgraced, so neither could Christ. We must be, if he wills it, where he is. We must behold his glory; we must share it. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

You notice the division that there is here. There are two parties; there is the world, and there is the Church; what is it that divides them? Read these two

clauses: “The world hath not known thee:” “These have known that thou hast sent me.” What stands between? “But I have known thee.” It is Christ himself, coming in between the two parties, like the cloudy-fiery pillar, black with darkness to the Egyptians, but bright with light to the Israelites. Oh, to have Christ between you and the world! It is the best form of separation: “I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.”

25. *O righteous Father, the world hath not know thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.*

It is delightful to hear Jesus praying in this way for us, side by side with himself, though we are unworthy of so unspeakable an honor; praying for us as if his own self, his own glory, depended upon our safety. If Christ prayed thus for us, how ought we to pray for one another!

26. *And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it:*

As long as the Christ lived, he showed forth his Father’s glory, and so should we. If we have declared it, we should say, “And will declare it.”

That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

“That the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.” Thus the glorious union stands. May we always rejoice in it.

How rich is this language! How musical! Surely, never did any human poem match this peerless prose of the Divine Teacher.

And now, what a descent it is as we pass on to the next scene in his life!

John 18

1. *When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples.*

From our Lord's example, we should learn, when trouble is near, to meet it with composure. Our Savior did not sit still; but, as the hour approached for his betrayal and death, "he went forth with his disciples."

The passing over the black brook of Cedron, through which flowed the filth of the temple, was very significant. King David had crossed that brook long before when he had been driven from his home by Absalom's rebellion, and now the greater David went "over the brook Cedron, where was a garden."

He specially wanted solitude just then, for one of the best preparations for suffering is to get alone with God. Learn this lesson also from your Lord's example, and as he put Gethsemane before Calvary, if you can put an hour of prayerful contemplation before your expected suffering, it will be a great help to you.

2. *And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus ofttimes resorted thither with his disciples.*

That dark and gloomy olive garden was no pleasure garden that night. It had often been a place of retirement and of prayer for the Master. What happy memories his disciples must have had of being with him there for a season of prayer! It was a very choice privilege for them to be with him when he preached, but it must have been, if possible, a still greater privilege to be with him when he prayed. It is not recorded that his disciples ever said to him, "Lord, teach us how to preach;" but at least one of them was so struck with his prayers that he said,

“Lord, teach us to pray.” We may well ask him to do that for us now. Perhaps some of you would like to be taught how you can become great; it is much more important for you to be taught to become prayerful.

3. *Judas then, having received a band of men and of officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.*

It does not matter much about the band of men and officers with lanterns and torches and weapons, but the dreadful part of the narrative is that they were led by one who had been a disciple of Christ, one who had been numbered with the apostles. Is Christ still betrayed by his professed friends? Yes, it is so, but may you and I never be guilty of that terrible crime! Yet why should we not unless the grace of God should prevent it? We are of the same flesh and blood as Judas; and although we might not be tempted by a sum of money, we may be tempted by a sinful pleasure or by a sinful shame. Lest we should be led astray, let us pray that we may not enter into temptation, and especially ask that we may be preserved from betraying our Lord, as Judas did.

4. *Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?*

It is a wonderfully suggestive thought that Jesus knew everything that would happen to him. Martyrs and other sufferers for Christ’s sake have had some measure of foresight of what they had to endure; but none of them could have so exquisite a foretaste of everything as our blessed Lord had. He knew it all—every single atom of pain, and anguish, and heartbreak. He knew it all, yet he calmly “went forth” to meet it, and said to those who came to drag him away to his death, “Whom seek ye?”

5. *They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he.*

Or, rather, “I Am,” pronouncing the words with a divine dignity which had a startling effect upon them.

And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them.

What a hardened wretch he must have been to be able to stand with them! One would have thought that, having betrayed his Master, he would have hidden himself away for shame, but no, "Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them." His heart must have been steeled.

6. *As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.*

It seems as if our Lord intended to let them realize something of his divine power and glory, for the utterance of that august expression, I am, which is his Father's name, staggered them, and they fell to the ground.

Do you not wonder that they did not rise up, and go away and leave him after they had fallen at his feet and asked his forgiveness? They did not so act, for the power of fear when it is not accompanied by love is very small. There was enough power in it to make them fall down to the ground, but there was not power enough in it to make them fall at Christ's feet confessing their sin.

7. *Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.*

Do they return again to the fray? Having once felt Christ's divine power, do they summon courage enough to attack him again? Yes, for there is no limit to the malice and impudence of the human heart.

8. *Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way:*

That was a very gracious saying of Christ's, "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." This is what Christ says on his people's behalf to death, and to the law and the justice of God, and though this saying does not excuse the disciples' flight, it does make some sort of apology for their going away every man to his own home. Christ knew that they would be safer there. One of them followed

him afar off instead of going his way, and you know what came of it. There is a time for openly following Christ, and there is a time when Jesus says, “Let these go their way.” So, right to the end he takes care of his sheep and bids them scatter for a while now that the sword is about to enter their Shepherd’s heart.

9. *That the saying might be fulfilled which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.*

He had only said that just a little while before, but this verse shows us that the New Testament is as sure to be fulfilled as the Old Testament. It was a new saying, not then written, yet it had all the life and power of God in it; so it must live, and must be fulfilled.

10. *Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus.*

Here is every prospect of a fight. Simon Peter has begun it, and the armed men will be eager to continue it. We always have our Simon Peters about—men of emotion, men of impulse, men of impetuosity. They are not a bad sort of Christians, and I do not know what we should do without them.

Our cold, frozen thinkers would not do much without our warmhearted Peters to help to thaw them. Still, Peter was only one of the twelve apostles; and though they call him the head of the church, he made a very poor head of the church just then. He drew a sword, and began to use that carnal weapon by cutting off the right ear of Malchus. It was a great mercy that the Lord was there to heal the ear, and to forbid the use of the sword in his defense.

11. *Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

Here is another helpful lesson for any of you who have a trial before you. Do not seek to set the trial aside, use no wrong means to escape from affliction; drink your ordained cup. Though Peter’s sword is handy, put it up into its sheath, and do not use it. Bear and forbear, on and on and on to the end of the chapter. Drink

the cup that your Father gives you. However bitter it is, it is sweetened by the fact that he gives it to you. Shall not a true son of God drink the cup that his Father presents to him? There can be no harm in it, and it must work you some real good; so put up your sword, and lift the cup to your lips, and drink it to the dregs.

12. *Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him.*

When you are bound with sickness, or bound with weakness, or bound in any other way, do not complain. Your Master was bound, and I think we ought to be willing to be anything that Christ was. What was good enough for him is good enough for us.

13. *Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus and bound him, and led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year.*

Annas had been high priest before, and he seems to have been regarded still as high priest and to have been a leading spirit amongst the adversaries of Christ. The old sinner would not go to bed that night until he had seen the man whom he hated brought bound before him. Sometimes hatred becomes a more powerful passion than even love; and here, while the disciples of Jesus all fled in terror, Annas, the Saviour's bitter foe, was wide awake, and awaiting his arrival with those who had taken him captive.

14. *Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.*

Christ could not die without the question of expediency turning up. I never knew any great sin in the world, nor any great heresy, nor any great combination of men to maintain it without the question of expediency coming under consideration. Expediency is the great Christ-killer. Many nowadays say to us, "Do not preach against error; it is not expedient to do so. Do not break away from evil associations; it is not expedient." How many there are of even good men who do certain thing, not because they are right, but because they are

expedient! But, believers in Jesus, in the name of your Lord I implore you to hate expediency, since it put him to death. It was a wicked expediency that would murder Christ in order to save a nation; but it did not really do so, after all, for the guilt of slaying Christ brought upon the nation the growing crime of deicide.

15. *And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest.*

This other disciple was, no doubt, John, who thus veiled himself as he did on other occasions.

16. *But Peter stood at the door without.*

It would have been better for him if he had kept there, he would probably have been more out of the way of temptation than he was inside the palace of the high priest.

Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter.

No doubt she had a lamp in her hand, that she might watch the features of those who were admitted; so, when Peter came in, she had a good view of his face; and, afterwards, when he was at the fire, this is the woman who went and showed him up.

John doubtless acted thus out of kindness to Peter, but he was the means of bringing his friend into a place where he was not strong enough to keep his feet. You and may act like that, perhaps, in perfect innocence, and even with commendable kindness; yet we may be unintentionally doing our friends a great wrong.

I notice that John seems to have been the first of the apostles to associate with Peter after that terrible fall of his; and in his record of Peter’s denial of his Lord he does not mention his cursing and swearing as Matthew and Mark do. He

appears to have felt great tenderness towards Peter; perhaps all the more so because he had been the innocent means of getting him into the place of temptation.

17. *Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this man's disciples? He saith, I am not.*

As, Peter! Ah, myself! If anyone is trusting in himself, he may soon utter a falsehood concerning his Lord, as Peter did. Keep us, O God, by thy grace, or else it will be so with us. It was nothing but a poor maidservant that cowed this brave Peter; the man whose sword was drawn just now in his Master's defense is not able truthfully to answer the maid's question.

18. *And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals, for it was cold: and they warmed themselves and Peter stood with them and warmed himself.*

While his Lord and Master was being maltreated and abused over yonder at the end of the hall, Peter was warming himself at the servant's fire. Ah! he was getting cold spiritually while warming himself physically; and it sometimes happens that, when men are warming their bodies, they are at the same time cooling their hearts. I have known a man warm himself at a very big fire through coming into possession of a large amount of property, but he has also grown very cold spiritually, for these coals of fire do not warm the heart.

19. *The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine.*

This was a sort of preliminary examination before the Sanhedrin should try him officially.

20, 21. *Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto thee: behold, they know what I*

said.

What an admirable answer that was! Whatever he might have said about his doctrine, they would have twisted into a ground of accusation against him, so he simply said, “Mine has been public teaching, open to all. I was not found in holes and corners, secretly fomenting sedition. I spoke in the streets; I spoke in the synagogue; I spoke in the temple; ask those who heard me to tell you what I said.” What more convincing answer could he have given?

22. *And when he had thus spoken one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?*

Here we get an exposition of one of Christ’s own sayings. You know that he said, “Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Of course, Christ would carry out his own precept, so we see that be did not mean that his disciples were literally to turn the other cheek to those who struck them, but that they were to bear such treatment patiently, and not to give a railing answer. See how Jesus himself turned the other cheek.

23. *Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?*

Not as Paul did, “God shall smite thee, thou whited wall.” The Master is superior to the disciple at all points. Nothing could have been more calm or more dignified, and, at the same time, more full of the spirit of forgiveness.

Let us pray that, whenever we are despitefully treated, we may keep our temper, and be as composed as our Lord was; and if we must make an answer to our accusers, let it be as discreet and as justifiable as this answer of our Lord was.

24. *Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest.*

So there we see him standing, bound, before Caiaphas, the acting high priest for that year.

25-27. *And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself.*

John thus resumes the narrative concerning Peter from the 17th verse. Twice over, we are told that, while his Master was being buffeted, Peter stood in the midst of the ribald throng, and warmed himself.

They said therefore unto him,

Two or three or more of them speaking at a time said to him—

Art not thou also one of his disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with him? Peter then denied again:

Ah, me! they who lie once will be all too apt to lie again; those who deny Christ once will be apt to go to still greater lengths in their denial of him. May they be stopped as Peter was!

And immediately the cock crew.

Thus was Christ's prediction literally fulfilled, and thus, by what seems the humble instrumentality of a cock crowing, was Peter brought to repentance. There is many an eloquent divine who has missed the mark when he has been preaching, but God has spoken by a very humble voice.

You, dear friend, though you have no gifts of speech, may go and tell the story of Jesus Christ to someone, and God may bring him to repentance through you, as he brought Peter back to himself through the agency of this bird.

28. *Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgement:*

That is to say, Pilate's hall. Pilate, at that time, was probably residing in one of the old and sumptuous palaces of Herod, there holding his court during the time of the Passover.

And it was early;

They were very eager to prove their enmity to Christ; they had spent the night, and the earliest moments of the dawn, in examining their illustrious prisoner, condemning him, and abusing him, and now they were off to Pilate.

And they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.

What could defile such wretches at these? Yet they were afraid of ceremonial defilement, though neither afraid nor ashamed to imbrue their hands in the blood of Jesus.

29. *Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man?*

He loathed and detested them, yet, for his own evil purposes, he would yield to their wishes and whims.

30. *They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.*

As much as to say, “You may take that for granted. We would not have brought him if he had not done wrong. You need not examine into the matter, we have already heard the evidence, and convicted him, and so saved you all the trouble of trying him; we only bring him here for you to condemn him.”

31. *Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law.*

“That is your way of doing such things, but it is not a method into which we shall fall. Our law does not condemn a man before it hears the evidence against him. I am not going to be your tool, to put this man to death without hearing what is laid to his charge, and the proofs of his guilt. If you want that done, you

must do it yourselves."

The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:

"You Romans have taken from us the power of life and death, and we want him put to death." There was a clear confession that nothing short of Christ's death would satisfy them.

32. *That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.*

Crucifixion was a Roman, not a Jewish method of capital punishment, so God overruled the wanton wickedness of the worst of men for the accomplishment of his own eternal purposes, without, however, diminishing their responsibility and guilt in the least degree. It was "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" that Christ was put to dentin, yet it was "with wicked hands" that they took him, and crucified him.

33. *Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?*

He did not look much like it. There was little enough about his appearance or his apparel to suggest the idea of royalty.

34-36. *Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew?*

I can imagine him throwing all the scorn and contempt possible into the question. It was characteristic of the Romans, as we learn from the works of their great writers, that they utterly despised and detested the Jews.

Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee, unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this

world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.

A spiritual kingdom! Pilate would not have given the smallest Roman coin for such a kingdom as that. Our Savior's own countrymen did not understand what he meant by a spiritual kingdom "not of this world." They were looking for a temporal prince, an earthly leader who would deliver them from the Roman yoke; but Jesus asserts that his kingdom, whatever it is, and wherever it is, is a spiritual thing.

Observe how he replied—without any tartness, without even the appearance of anger. He was very courteous towards Pilate; he put what he had to say in a fashion which would commend itself to him. He knew that Pilate's chief jealousy was about his being a king, and he tried to remove it by explaining that his kingdom was not of this world, else would his servants fight for him so that he should not be delivered to the Jews. I cannot conceive of replies, to such a man as Pilate, more suitable, more calculated to have done him good if there had been any soil in Pilate's heart upon which the good seed could have fallen with the hope of growth

37. *Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king.*

There stands Jesus, a bound prisoner, before one who can order him to be put to death; and the judge contemptuously says to him, "Art thou a king then?" and he answers, with great gentleness, but most decidedly and undoubtedly, "I am a king, even as thou sayest." I think I see Pilate's lip curl; I can imagine the supreme contempt with which he looked upon the miserable victim before him, disowned by his own countrymen, who had brought him there because, in their hate, they wished to have him put to death; yet he talks about being a king!

To this end was I born, and for this cause came I unto the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

We might have expected that be would have said, “I came into the world that I might be a king.” But he explains that, as a witness to the truth, he was a King.

38. *Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.*

He did not want an answer. He merely thought it such an unnecessary piece of trifling to talk about truth, he himself had so slight an idea of what the word might mean, that when he had said, “What is truth?” “he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.” That was the truth about the Truth, from the lips of a man who cared nothing about truth, yet who was compelled to bear this testimony, “I find in him no fault at all.”

39. *But we have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?*

Now, Pilate may have thought, if Christ was their King, they would certainly prefer him to a thief and a robber; so he was putting before himself an opportunity of escaping from judging Christ, and before them a test as to whether there really was in them any liking for the Christ, or any possibility of his becoming their King.

40. *Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.*

This wretch is brought out and set in competition with Christ. The multitude are appealed to. Pilate thinks that from the sense of shame they really cannot possibly prefer Barabbas; but they are so bloodthirsty against the Savior, and are so moved by the priests, that with one consent—there does not appear to have been a single objecting voice, nor one hand held up to the contrary—with a marvellous unanimity of vice, they cry, “Not this man, but Barabbas,” though they must have known, since he was a notable well-known offender, that Barabbas was a murderer, a felon, and a traitor

John 19

1. *Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.*

This was one of the most terrible punishments to which a man could be sentenced. The Roman scourge was no trifle. It tore off the quivering flesh of the agonized sufferer, for it was constructed on purpose to do so. It was generally made of the sinews of oxen, intertwisted with the knuckle bones of sheep, and small slivers of bone. This torture our blessed Savior endured. These are the stripes with which we are healed.

2. *And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe,*

Mockery was blended with cruelty. They might have made him a crown, yet surely it need not have been one of thorns unless they intended to put him to the utmost torment that they could conceive. By this crown of thorns our blessed Lord was crowned King of the curse, for the earth was cursed through Adam's sin, and part of the sentence pronounced by God in the garden of Eden was, "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee." So Christ wore the mark of the curse which man's sin had brought upon the world.

3. *And said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands.*

This was the homage which the Son of God received from men; harmless and gentle, he came here with no purpose but that of doing good, and this is how mankind treated him.

4, 5. *Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!*

Was there ever such a sight of majesty in misery before or since? Yet he needed not to endure all that ignominy, he was no vanquished monarch unable to maintain his own rights. He was still "over all, God blessed for ever," and be could have smitten everyone there to death if he had pleased to do so. But he was the Lamb of God's passover, so he meekly suffered.

6, 7. *When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.*

They no doubt understood that he claimed to be divine, and so he did. I have heard some say that he was a good man, but not God. If he was not God, he was certainly not a good man, for no good man, who was only a man, would claim to be God, or lead others to believe that he was divine. If he was not actually divine, he was a rank impostor; but he was divine, and therefore we worship and adore him equally with the Father and the Spirit.

8–10. *When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?*

Pilate talks like some great one, yet how contemptibly little he was, vacillating, cowardly, unable to do what he knew was right. His poor Victim who stood before him was infinitely greater in character than he was.

11. *Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.*

Christ referred to Judas, and through him to the Jews who had conspired to put him to death; but what tenderness it was, on the part of Jesus, to make an excuse as it were even for Pilate! He was notable for making excuses for the guilty. That was a remarkable excuse that he pleaded for his murderers, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” There was never another such a tender heart as his; he was so gentle and so kind that all their cruelty only moved him to pity them, and pray for them.

12–14. *And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that crying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!.*

They had accused him of being a King, or of pretending to be one. Pilate had scourged him, the soldiers had mocked him, and there he stood, a piteous spectacle of woe.

What mockery there was in Pilate’s use of this title, and yet how true it was! They asked to have Christ put to death, yet he was their King. Their accusation was transparently false, and Pilate made them see that it was so.

15. *But they cried out, away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King?*

“How could you call him King, and bring against him a charge of setting up a rival kingdom when you, who would be his subjects, are all crying out, ‘Crucify him’? ‘Shall I crucify your King?”’ How false they were their own actions

proved.

The chief priests answered, we have no king but Caesar.

They said this with all the coolness in the world. The mob had been stirred up and excited, but the chief priests, the principal ecclesiastics of the day, coolly said, “We have no king but Caesar.” Did they not recollect that the scepter was not to pass away from Judah until Shiloh came, so that, as it had evidently passed away, Shiloh must have come? After all their Bible-reading, did they not know that? Oh, how easy it is to read much of Scripture and yet to know little about its teaching!

16. *Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away.*

So was he led as a sheep to the slaughter, as Isaiah had long before foretold that he would be.

17. *And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha:*

Probably a knoll of rock which today stands outside the city gate looking wonderfully like a skull, with two depressions in the rook which at distance appear like eyes. This was the common place of execution, the Tyburn, the Old Bailey of Jerusalem.

18. *Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.*

As if to show that they thought him the worst of the three, and therefore gave him—shall I call it the place of chief dishonor?

19. *And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

What could have moved Pilate to write that title? Perhaps he did it just to let the Jews know that they had forced him to put the Christ to death; he would put over him their accusation without any endorsement of his own: “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS;” and so he is, and King of the Gentiles, too.

20. *This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was near to the city and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin.*

So that everybody could read it, for some one or other of these languages would be known to everybody in the crowd; they were not dead languages then as they are now.

21, 22. *Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am king of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.*

He could be stubborn about some things which shows that he had strength of mind if he had chosen to use it; yet he was beaten to and fro like a shuttlecock by these wicked men, and seemed to have no power to resist them.

23. *Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments,*

They had already stripped him, no element of shame was wanting in his substitution for us. He stooped as low as our sins could have thrust us, that he might bring us up from the very depths of degradation and shame.

and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat woven without seam, woven from the top throughout.

The common robe of the country, for Christ assumed no garment or vesture that would make him seem great. He was too great to need the adornment of any

special style of clothes.

24. *They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots.*

Quite unaware of the ancient prophecy, yet in complete accord with divine predestination these soldiers did exactly according to the eternal purposes of God. It is very wonderful how, in practice, the free agency of man tallies exactly with the predestination of God. We need not enquire how it is, but we may admire that so it is.

These things therefore the soldiers did.

"These things therefore the soldiers did," yet the motive which swayed them was not the fulfillment of the divine will, but simply the common-sense thought that it would be a pity to spoil such a garment by rending it and partly also by that innate love of gambling which is found everywhere, in every age, so that often men would sooner run the hazard of winning all than take the safe one fourth which might fall to their lot. Let us reverently adore the whole scheme of providence by which God's determinate purpose is carried out in every jot and little, while the free agency of man is left unfettered.

25. *Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.*

These gracious women stood by the cross: we call them the feebler sex; but we must grant that they are the stronger of the two in anything which has to do with pure disinterested love. Yield the first place to them.

26. *When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith into his mother, Woman, behold thy son!*

Sad, sad spectacle! Now was fulfilled the word of Simeon, "Yes, a sword shall

pierce through thine own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Did the Savior mean, as he gave a glance to John, "Woman, thou art losing one Son; but yonder stands another, who will be a son to thee in my absence"? "Woman, behold thy son!"

27. *Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother!*

"John, take her home, and treat her as a mother should be treated."

And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

He was the disciple whom Jesus specially loved, so as a token of Christ's great love to him, he left his mother to his charge. Have you any poor folk dependent upon you? Do you know any of God's very poor people? Take care of them, and do not think the charge a burden; but do it for the sake of him who loves you so much that he entrusts his poor ones to you. Oh, that everybody would look at this matter of caring for God's poor in that light!

28. *After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst!*

It seems a strange thing that Jesus should have said, "I thirst," because, out of all the pains that he endured upon the cross, and they were very many and very sharp, he never mentions one except thirst. A person in such terrible agony as he was enduring might have mentioned fifty things, but he singles out this one because there was a prophecy concerning it.

29. *Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.*

Why is hyssop mentioned here? You remember that the hyssop was used in the cleansing of the leper, and that David prayed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." The hyssop was also used in the sprinkling of blood under the law, so it is introduced here with a set purpose.

The sponge is introduced here too; it always seems to me very remarkable that, in the death of Christ the circle of life was completed. The sponge is the very lowest form of animal life, and Christ is the very highest type of life of any kind. The sponge was lifted to the lip of the King of glory, and carried refreshment to him; and you and I, like the sponge, the very least of God's living ones, may yet bring refreshment to our Saviour's lips.

30. *When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished;*

Incarnate love has fulfilled its self-imposed task. Jesus, as the substitute for sinners, was condemned to die, and he died that he might finish the work of our redemption.

and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

It is not that he died, and that then his head fell forward; but while he yet lived, having before maintained an erect, noble bearing even in the pangs of death, he now, to show his perfect resignation to his Father's will bows his head, and yields up that saved spirit of his which dwelt within his body.

31. *The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.*

To prevent a ceremonial error, they are willing to commit brutal cruelty; indeed, they had already committed the more brutal cruelty of putting Christ to death. How particular some men are about some merely human rubric, yet the divine precepts of the law they violate with impunity. God save us from a conscience which will stick at some minute point which is of no consequence, but will allow us to commit great sin! We have heard of a Spanish bandit who confessed to his priest, after having murdered a great many persons, not his robberies and his murders, but the fact that a drop of blood had spurted on to his lips on a Friday, and thus he had defiled the feast day by taking animal food! Ah me! conscience is a strange thing, yet some call it "the vice-gerent of God." I believe it is no

such thing, but that it very soon becomes as depraved as any other power of the human mind: we have need of far more than conscience to keep us right.

32. *Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him.*

With a huge iron bar smashing the great bones of their legs.

33, 34. *But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they broke not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced him twice, and forthwith there came out blood and water.*

See how, even after death, his heart it tribute poured out for us. We have not only the love of Christ's heart blessing us while he lives, but after he died there was the stream of blood and water to cleanse us from sin's guilt and power.

36, 37. *And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced.*

So his side must be pierced, but his bones must not be broken. See how the hand of God carries out the Word of God, and value every line of Scripture. Our Lord Jesus Christ seemed to go out of his way so as to ensure that every single word in the Old Testament in reference to himself should be fulfilled, so mind that you do not think little of the Old Testament which he so highly prized.

38. *And after this Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus:*

There is one Joseph, who has an estate at Arimathea, a wealthy man, a member of the Sanhedrim, "an honorable counsellor." He appears upon the scene, and he

is the right man to do what is required, for he is a secret disciple. He has great respect for that dead body; for he had great regard for Jesus while he was alive.

and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.

Christ's being given up for burial, was Pilate's certificate that he had not merely pretended to die, but that it was a real death, and that his body had no life remaining in it. This is an essential point, for if Jesus did not die, he has made no atonement for sin. If he died not, then he rose not; and if he rose not, then your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. The sepulcher, therefore, occupies a very important place in the story of the death of Jesus.

39. *And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night,*

How honorable to Christ was it that the first two and the chief mourners on that sorrowful occasion should be two members of the Sanhedrim, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two men of note, two reputable individuals who were held in honor even among the Jews who crucified Christ!

and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus.

Oh, how tenderly, and with how many tears, did they take their Lord's body from the cross!

40. *And wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.*

The manner of the Jews is to bury the body wrapped in fine white linen; where is that? I do not believe that Peter has a yard of it anywhere, I hardly think that James and John have anything much finer than fishermen's coats, and so forth. Fine linen—let it be the best that can be bought, let it be white as snow, for wrapping around this perfect body; but where is it to be obtained? Joseph has it;

he is a man of wealth, who can get anything that is wanted, and he has brought with him the best winding-sheets in which to wrap the Savior's body.

But we must also have mixed spices in abundance, fifty pounds' weight not the least. "Oh!" says Nicodemus, "I have brought one hundred pounds' weight with me, and if I could have found a conveyance, and more spices had not been superfluous, I would have brought many hundred pounds weight of myrrh and aloes, well mingled according to the art of apothecary, with which to surround that blessed form."

41, 42. *Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulcher was nigh at hand.*

We have the body, Pilate has given us that; we have the spices and the fine linen; and we have the two men ready to bury the body; now we want a tomb. It would be very convenient, and also very important, if we could get a sepulcher near at hand; because, you see, if the body of Christ had to be carried a long way to be buried, the Jews would say, "Ah! they changed it on the road; they took it a mile or two out of the city, and the Christ who rose from the dead is not the Christ that was buried." But here, just at the bottom of this rocky scarp which is called Golgotha, there is a garden, and in that garden there is a tomb. Hark the providence of God in this matter, for that tomb belongs to Joseph, and there the Savior's body is lovingly laid. He did not, and he could not, lack a tomb when it was required; when the time came for him to be buried, the sepulcher was there already prepared, hewn out of the rock.

It would be also a great advantage if it could be a new tomb, wherein never was anybody buried; for if they buried him in an old tomb, the Jews would say that he had touched the bones of some prophet or other holy man, and so came to life. Ah! well, Joseph's is a new tomb; there are no bones there, for nobody has ever been buried there before.

John 20

1. *The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher.*

Her love for her Lord made her rise early, and helped her to overcome the fear which would have prevented many from going out “when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher.” There are fears which some cannot shake off in the dark, and those fears would be apt to become intensified in going to a sepulcher in the dark; but love wakes early to try to find Christ, and love can see in the dark when looking for Jesus. Mary little expected to find the tomb of Jesus rifled, and the stone rolled away; she was so surprised at what she saw that she hurried away to tell the story to other friends of her Lord.

2. *Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him.*

This was the language of ignorance and unbelief. She had forgotten that the Lord had said that he would rise again, the third day; or else she had never understood the meaning of his words; so, instead of saying “He is risen,” she said, “They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him.” Unbelief often reads things wrongly; it reads sorrow into facts that should create joy. Nothing could have made Mary happier than to believe that her Lord had risen from the dead, and nothing ever made her more sorrowful than feeling that she must say, “They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him.”

3, 4. *Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher.*

They wanted to know what had really happened, so they resolved that they would go and see. The woman's message surprised them, and troubled them: "So they ran both together." A good many people seemed to be running that morning. Had the disciples known the whole truth, they might have taken to dancing for joy, but their fears quickened their footsteps.

5. *And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying;* —

So that he knew that they had not taken away the body of Jesus; for, if they had, they certainly would not have taken off the linen clothes. It would have been very difficult, and would have taken considerable time to unwrap the cold grave-clothes when they were bound to the body by the unguents that had been used: "He saw the linen clothes lying;"—

Yet went he not in.

Perhaps, out of reverence; or, possibly, out of deference to the older man, he would give him the preference, and let him enter first.

6. *Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulcher, and seeth the linen clothes lie,*

They were evidently both struck with that sight. It indicated that there had been no haste, no hurry by thieves, but deliberate action of quite another kind.

7. *And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.*

As one has well said, there were the grave-clothes left as the furniture for the

believer's last bed, and there was the napkin, "in a place by itself," to wipe away the tears of mourners. The chief lesson is that this act had been done at leisure by someone who was in no hurry whatever. He had put together the linen clothes, and wrapped up the napkin, and laid it "in a place by itself."

8. *Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulcher, and he saw, and believed.*

That is a great deal for John to be able to say concerning himself, for Mary had not yet believed. Possibly, Peter had scarcely believed, but John had. He felt certain that the Lord had risen. He remembered his words, and he correctly interpreted the fact now before him: "he saw, and believed."

9. *For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.*

They did not understand it; even John himself did not until then. The rest of the disciples had never put that interpretation upon our Lord's words which was the clear and simple meaning of them, namely, that he would rise from the dead. I should not wonder if there are other words of Scripture, with regard to the future, which we should comprehend if we took them exactly as they stand in the Word; but we have put other meanings upon them, and consequently see no further into them.

10. *Then the disciples went away again unto their own home.*

Having ascertained that the body of Jesus was not there, and John having come to the conclusion that the Lord had indeed risen from the dead, he and Peter went away home prayerfully to wait and see what next would happen.

11. *But Mary stood without at the sepulcher weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulcher,*

You see, dear friends, love is very patient and persevering. The other disciples had gone away home, but not so Mary, she stands outside the sepulcher, and still

waits, for she cannot go till she has seen her Lord.

Love, however, has many sorrows for, as Mary stood without the sepulcher, she was weeping. Oftentimes your love to Christ will make you sorrowful when you for a while lose his presence; it will be a great sorrow to you if your Lord should seem to have hidden himself from you. But see how quick-sighted love is; Mary saw the angels, whom the other disciples might have seen if they had not gone home. One of the beatitudes is, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God;” and love is one of the most eminent signs of purity. I do not wonder, therefore, that love saw angels, since love sees God himself.

12. *And seeth two angels in white—*

The resurrection color, the color of joy and gladness: “two angels in white”—

sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

This sight seems to remind one of the mercy-seat, where the cherubim stood facing each other, and covering the mercy-seat with their outspread wings.

13. *And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?*

They could not understand Mary’s tears, their question seemed to say “Christ the Lord is risen from the dead, and all the streets of heaven are ringing with hallelujahs because the great Conqueror has returned bearing the spoils of his victory. Why weepest thou? Art not thou one of those for whom this redeeming work was done? ‘Woman, why weepest thou?’”

She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

That was enough to make any of Christ’s loved ones weep, and if ever you hear a sermon which has not Christ in it, you may well go down the aisle weeping, and if any ask why you weep, you may reply, “Because they have taken away

my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him."

14. *And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.*

A strange and sad unbelief had taken possession of her, and there is nothing that blinds the eye so quickly as unbelief. Christ is near thee, poor soul, near thee in thy trouble, but thou dost not know that it is Jesus. Open thine eyes, may God the Holy Spirit touch them with his heavenly eye-salve, that thou mayest see that it is Christ himself who is close beside thee!

15. *Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.*

Did it occur to her that, possibly, the gardener objected to having a corpse in the garden, and that, therefore, he had come early in the morning, and taken it away? We can hardly imagine what she did think; but when people are in great grief, they often think a great many things which they would not think if they were quite in their right minds. What strange delusions, what singular chimeras of monstrous shape will pass through the heart of grief! God help us to be clear-minded, and not to think what we should not like to say! Still, Mary was a brave woman, for she said to the gardener, "Tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away."

16. *Jesus saith unto her, Mary.*

In the simple utterance of her name, there were tones which she could not mistake, it was the sweetest music she had heard since her Lord's last message from the cross: "Mary." "Why, surely," she must have thought, "it was the Master's voice calling me by name!"

She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

Or, “My Master!” The word “Rabboni” means something more than “Master.” Mary seems to say, “Greatest and best of all teachers, I know thy voice; now that thou hast called me by my name, I recognize thee, and I wait to listen to the instruction thou art ready to impart to me.”

17. *Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father:*

“There will be time enough for the fellowship your heart craves:”—

But go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

Practical service is better than personal rapture. Mary would fain have held her Lord, but he says to her, “Go to my brethren.” You will always find that it is best and safest to do what Jesus tells you, when he tells you, and as he tells you. What a delightful message is this from the risen Christ! “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.”

18. *Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord,*

That was a very different message from her first one. Then she came and said, “He is gone; the tomb is empty; the stone is rolled away;” now she comes with the joyful tidings, “I have seen our risen Lord.”

And that he had spoken these things unto her.

Sometimes, we have to deliver the message of stern justice, which is one of doom to the guilty; but, oh, how sweet it is to be able to come with the message of the gospel!

19. *Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week,*

when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews,

If they had possessed more faith, they would have left a door open for Jesus to come in, however anxious they might have been to shut out the Jews. I am afraid, dear brethren and sisters, that we also are sometimes more anxious about shutting out the Jews than we are about letting in Christ. I mean, we are very particular in trying to keep out our own troubles and cares, but if we get Jesus within, we shall not think of the Jews, nor of our troubles and cares; they will all disappear as soon as he appears.

came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

He has not risen from the tomb many hours before we find him thus coming to his disciples. His love to them was too great to permit him to be long absent from them. He had said to them, “A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me;” so he kept his word. He stood in their midst, and said unto them, “Peace be unto you.” He is the Lord and Giver of peace just as much now as he was then.

20. *And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side.*

These were the marks to help their recognition of him. These were the memorials to excite their gratitude. These, too, were the tokens of his condescension; for a man does not show his wounds to any but to those whom he loves; “He showed unto them his hands and his side.” You cannot see that sight, brethren, but you can meditate upon it. Think how he gave those blessed hands to the nails, and that precious side to the soldier’s spear; and, as you think of them, let your love flow forth unto him who suffered thus for you.

Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.

I should think they were glad. They had been afraid of the Jews; but they forgot

that fear when they saw the Lord. I suppose that, at first, when he suddenly appeared in their midst, they were afraid of him; but now there was first a sacred calm, and then there was a ripple of holy gladness on the surface of the still waters of their souls. We cannot see him, brethren, with these eyes of ours; but by faith we can behold him, so we may have gladness even as the disciples had. We ought to be the gladdest people in all the world, because Christ is ours, and is spiritually with us as he promised that he would be.

21. *Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.*

"You are to go forth and to bless the world, even as I have done. My Father hath sent me; and even so send I you." You are to be my delegates, to carry on my service; my commissioned officers, to go forth to conflict and to conquest in my name."

22, 23. *And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.*

This is as much as for Christ to say, "I will back up your ministry. When you preach that men are condemned for sin of which they have not repented, I will make it to be so as a matter of fact. When you declare pardon to all who trust in my precious blood, I will make it so. That truth, which you preach, shall have my seal of approval set upon it. My power shall go forth with your proclamation of the truth, so that it shall be seen that you are not proclaiming a fiction. When you preach my gospel, I will remit the sins of all who believe it; and when you pronounce sentence of condemnation on such as remain in unbelief, I will confirm your declaration!"

24. *But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came."*

Very likely, loving Jesus, as he evidently did very much, Thomas was broken-

hearted when he found that his Master was dead; so, when his fellow-disciples told him that Jesus was alive again, he could not believe it, he felt that the news was too good to be true. He had fallen into a fit of despondency, and got away, as broken-hearted, depressed people often do, trying to get quite alone, when Christian company would be one of the best ways of finding comfort and solace. So, "Thomas was not with them when Jesus came."

25. *The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord.*

"We have seen the Lord; there is no mistake about the matter, for we have all seen him." And thus, with loving, anxious desire, they tried to cheer him, and to make him participate in the gladness which they themselves had enjoyed. Dear friends, always look after your weak brethren. If there is a Thomas, who is depressed and sad, and who therefore shuns you, do not you shun him; but find him out, and try to tell him what you have learned by way of comfort for your own heart. Mayhap, God will use it to comfort him also.

But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

There is something good about that declaration of Thomas, for a man is not bound to believe merely on the testimony of others. He should, if he can, endeavor to get evidence for himself, and as Christ is still alive, the very best thing is to go to him. But there was also much that Thomas said which was very wrong, he had no right to demand that he should see the nail-prints in Christ's hands, and, worse still, that he should be permitted to put his finger into them, and to thrust his hand into his Lord's side. There was more than a little impertinence about that utterance, and something more even than an ordinary unbelief; and when we ask for signs and wonders from God, and say that we will not believe except we have them, we are guilty of very presumptuous conduct. We are bound to look for evidence concerning Christ; but when the evidence is sufficient, we ought not out of curiosity to crave for more.

26. *And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas*

with them:

That is better. His love brought him out, you see, away from himself; and it often happens that, by getting a man away from himself, we get him away from his worst enemy.

Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

His first salutation, after his resurrection, was such a choice one that there could not be a better, so he repeated it when he appeared the second time. Peace is so rich a blessing that even the Divine Master can say nothing sweeter to his faithful followers; so again he says to them, "Peace be unto you."

27. *Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.*

Our dear and condescending Master would give to his feeble, and somewhat petulant disciple, all the proofs he had himself asked to have. He shall have evidence clear as noonday if he must have it; Thomas, however, as I suppose, was wise enough not to accept the gracious offer of his Lord. Sometimes, it is wise not to take what God himself may put in our way. You remember how Balaam was allowed to go with the men sent to him by Balak, and he did so; yet it would have been much wiser of him if he had not gone. I do not think that Thomas did put his finger into the print of the nails, or thrust his hand into his Master's side. On the contrary, we read—

28. *And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

Leaping out of the slough of doubt, onto the rock of confidence, by a single spring, and getting further, perhaps, than others had done who had before outstripped him. He inferred the Deity of Christ from his wounds and his resurrection—a grand chain of argument of which we have not the intervening links. His thoughtful mind made him feel that, if Christ was indeed risen—the

same Christ who had died—it was proved, by those death-wounds, that he was both Lord and God; while his personal, appropriating faith, realizing the identity of the Savior's person, made him say, "My Lord and my God."

29. *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

That blessedness can be reached by all of us who believe in Christ. Those who lived in this world before Christ came, saw his day by faith, and they were blessed; those who lived in his day, and saw him in the flesh, and trusted him, were blessed; but we who cannot see him, yet believe in him, are the most blessed of them all.

30, 31. *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

Now, dear friends, has the purpose, for which this Book was written, been answered in your case? Have you been led to "believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God," and so to believe that you "have life through his name"? If not, why not? May you have grace to answer that question, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake!

John 21

1. *After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias; and on this wise showed he himself.*

Jesus loved to show himself to his people. Of old, his delights were with the sons of men; so, now that he had risen from the dead, he was not ashamed to visit his brethren, and he did not disdain to make himself known to them, and he will still show himself to us after a spiritual fashion, if we sincerely desire to see him.

2. *There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples.*

He had told them to go into Galilee, and given them the promise, “There shall ye see me.” So now they were by the Galilean lake they were keeping their tryst with Christ, and as he always keeps his tryst with his people, he was there to meet them, as he had promised.

As John was the writer of this record, he did not put his own name there, but merely mentioned “the sons of Zebedee.”

3. *Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee.*

Men who are in a right state of heart cannot willingly be idle; so, if these apostles cannot preach for a time, they will go back to their old employment, and seek to catch fish.

They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately; and that night they caught nothing.

Brethren, without Christ's presence, that is what always happens: "they caught nothing." But notice what the next verse says—

4. *But when the morning was now come, Jesus stood on the shore: but the disciples knew not that it was Jesus.*

We must remember that a great change had taken place in him, and that the disciples were at some distance from the shore. They saw a person standing there, but they were not sure who it was.

5. *Then Jesus saith unto them, Children, have ye any meat?*

Just the kind of language you would expect from him—to call them children, and to inquire even about their temporal wants. For evermore the Lord had an eye to the temporal condition of the twelve, as well as to their spiritual. "Have ye any meat?"

They answered him, No.

Jesus likes us to admit that we do not possess anything of our own before he gives us the blessing he is waiting to bestow. He lets us see that the table is bare before he loads it with his bounty, so that he may have all the praise and glory for what he gives us.

6. *And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes.*

He testified his presence by crowning their exertions with his blessing, and soon they had a great catch of great fishes—a great contrast to their night of fruitless toil.

7. *Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved (again John does not mention his own name,) saith unto Peter, It is the Lord.*

"It is only he who could spy out the fish, and only he who could fill the net with them; it is just his way of acting, 'It is the Lord.'"

The eyes of true love are very quick. Peter was not the first to recognize Jesus; John was, for he loved him most.

Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea.

He had such reverence for his Master that he would not appear before him without a sufficient covering, yet he was in a hurry to get to him. Peter always was in a hurry; yet he was grandly impetuous as a rule. I wish that some "slow-coaches" had a little of his pace.

8. *And the other disciples came in a little ship; (for they were not far from land, but as it were two hundred cubits,) dragging the net with fishes.*

It is all very well of Peter to be in such a hurry, but somebody must keep hold of the net. It is not always the most venturesome that is the most practical. We are glad to have some splendidly rash brethren, but we are equally glad that the rest are not quite so rash and are a little more prudent.

9. *As soon then as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread.*

How that fire must have reminded Peter of his denial of his Lord! He saw his Master by the light of the charcoal fire, and that is how he saw him on the night when he denied him.

10. *Jesus saith unto them, Bring of the fish which ye have now caught.*

“I do not need it in order to entertain you, for I have fish here already; still, bring it.” Nothing is given in vain; use it.

11. *Simon Peter went up, and drew the net to land full of great fishes, an hundred and fifty and three: and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.*

On the previous occasion when Peter’s net was miraculously filled by Christ, we read that the net brake. That was Peter’s own net, but this time I suppose it was not Peter’s, but one that he had borrowed, and probably he had no time to mend it, so the Master took care that it should not break. He always has his own ways of working, and they always fit the circumstances of the case, and show his thoughtful care of his people.

12. *Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine.*

Or, “Come and break your fast after your long night’s toil.” How they must have opened their eyes to see the fish ready cooked for them to eat!

And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord.

“It was the Lord,”—“the Lord” who had asked them if they had any food, “the Lord” who had filled the net which had previously been empty, “the Lord” who had given them his own fish from his own fire, that they might have breakfast with him.

13, 14. *Jesus then cometh, and taketh bread, and giveth them, and fish likewise. This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead.*

Count the visits of Christ. “This is now the third time.” We ought to remember Christ’s visits to us so well and so thoroughly that we could tell how many times he has been with us. “This is now the third time.”

15. *So when they had dined,*

When they had broken their fast—but not until then, for Christ does not talk to men when their hunger might make them inattentive—

Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?

"More than this lot of fish, these boats, these nets? You gave them all up for me once, but now you have taken to them again; do you really love me better than your fishing and your fish?"

He had talked as if he did: "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I."

He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee.

He was wise in not measuring his love in comparison with that of his fellow-disciples, or in speaking of the quantity of it, but he affirmed that Christ knew that he did really love him.

He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

"Do not go after fish any more, but attend to my business: 'feed my lambs.' The proof of your greater love to me than to all worldly things will be found in your doing of the work which I have committed to your charge."

16. *He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.*

"Quit the sea; I am giving you no more business there: come now, and be a pastor to my blood-bought sheep."

17. *He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou*

me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.

Thrice he had denied his Lord, so thrice he must be questioned concerning his love to the Lord whom he said he did not even know, and then for the third time he was re-commissioned by his Lord—

He saith unto him, Feed my sheep.

Here is a lesson for all who would be pastors of Christ's flock. The first necessity of a true pastor is love to Christ, the second necessity of a true pastor is love to Christ, and the third necessity of a true pastor is love to Christ. A man who does not love the great Shepherd cannot properly feed either his sheep or lambs. If his own heart is not right towards the divine Owner of the sheep, he cannot be a true under-shepherd to Christ's flock.

18. *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdest thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shall be old, thou shall stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not.*

Peter, thou wilt have to be girded with an iron chain, and taken off to prison, and taken off to the cross to die.

19. *This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God.*

Peter was to stretch out his hands, and be nailed to a cross, as his Lord was.

And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

"That is to be your rule, whether you feed my sheep or lambs, or whether you stretch out your hands upon a cross, and die as a martyr—'Follow me.'" That is also the rule for all of us who love the Lord. O Lord, help us to obey it!

20, 21. *Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee? Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, lord, and what shall this man do?*

Our Lord never answered such a foolish, inquisitive question as this, and therefore—

22. *Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.*

That is how Christ would answer any similar questions that we might put to him. We need not concern ourselves so much about what is to happen to others until we have made our own calling and election sure. “What is that to thee? follow thou me.”

23. *Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?*

The Word of God is to be trusted, and not tradition, for in the handing of a message from mouth to mouth it generally varies. It sometimes loses its very essential spirit, and sometimes may be made to say the very reverse of what was said. Stick to the word, and leave the traditions alone.

24, 25. *This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true. And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.*

Such a full life—so pregnant with meaning—so active, and all its activity so intensely real and spiritual, that to write a life of Christ is an impossibility: and though there have been many very admirable “lives of Christ” in our time, I

recommend you to keep to one which is the best of them all, and that one is written by four. The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the best life of Christ out of sight. All others must be but mere helps to the understanding of these four.

ACTS

Acts 1

1–3. *The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God:*

The resurrection of Christ, as we have often said, is the best attested of all historical facts. There is not half as much reason to be sure that Napoleon Bonaparte wee ever taken to St. Helena as to believe that Jesus Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father. If the resurrection of Christ is not credible, there remains nothing credible in history. I go further than that, and say that the news of yesterday, which you read in this morning's paper, you had no right to believe if you do not believe in Christ's resurrection, for the evidence in its favor is not half as strong as the evidence concerning the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

Remember that this feet was attested by men who could not be deceived concerning it, and who sealed with their blood, as well as with their unfaltering testimony, their solemn belief that they had touched him, that they had spoken to him, that they had listened to him, that they had eaten with him, and had seen

him eat of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb after he rose from the grave. We know that Christ has risen from the dead. That is one of the great corner stones of the Christian faith. Fall back on that in every time of doubt, and your fears will speedily disappear.

4, 5. *And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*

It is very usual for good men's memories, in their last hours, to go back to their first hours. I trust that some of us will think of our baptism even when we are dying. Our Lord began in such a way that he could afford to look back on his beginning. Some do not commence so; their beginning is so undecided, so imperfect, so hesitating, that they may well wish to have it forgotten. But our Lord, at the close of his sojourn on earth, thinks of John the Baptist, and pays him a dying word of respect just before he is taken up into glory.

6. *When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, LORD, will thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?*

They had not got rid of their old ideas concerning a kingdom visible among men, they still clung to the idea of a temporal kingdom for Israel. There were a kingdom already established by Christ; but in the sense in which they understood the word, they were sadly in error.

7. *And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.*

It is not your work. You are not sent into the world to be prophets; you are sent into the world to be witnesses. You do not come here to be prognosticators of the events of tomorrow about yourself, or about your children, or about your friends, or about the nations of the earth. A veil hangs between you and the future. Your prayer is to be, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in

heaven." You are told to look for the coming of your Lord, and to stand in perpetual expectation of his return; but to know the time when he will come, is no part of your office. You are servants who are to look for your Lord, who may come at cock-crowing, or at midday, or at midnight. Keep you always on the tiptoe of expectation. It would be wrong for you to profess that you need not watch until such and such a time, for he would not come until such a date arrived.

8. *But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you;*

This is what we want; we want the Holy Ghost. We often speak about this; but, in truth, it is unspeakable, the power of the Holy Ghost, mysterious, divine. When he comes upon a man, he is bathed in the very essence of the Deity. The atmosphere about him becomes the life and power of God.

and we shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

As indeed they were, for they went everywhere testifying to what they had seen and heard, and very many were the conversions that followed. We want the same power to rest upon us now that rested upon them when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

9. *And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.*

He begins to rise from the earth He has risen above them all to their astonishment! In a moment he has passed beyond the olives, which seem with their silvery sheen to be lit up by his milder radiance. While the disciples are looking, the Lord has ascended into mid-air, and speedily he has risen to the regions of the clouds. They stand spell-bound with astonishment, and suddenly a bright cloud, like a chariot of God, bears him away. That cloud conceals him from mortal gaze. Though we have known Christ after the flesh, now after the flesh know we him no more.

10. *And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up,*

They are riveted to the spot, very naturally so: they linger long in the place, they stand with streaming eyes, wonder-struck, still looking upward.

behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

Their lengthened gaze needed to be interrupted, and, therefore, two shining ones, such as aforetime met the women at the sepulcher, are sent to them. These messengers of God appear in human form that they may not alarm them, and in white raiment as if to remind them that all was bright and joyous; and these white-robed ministers stood with them as if they would willingly join their company.

11. *Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*

Addressing them in the usual celestial style, they asked a question which contained its own answer, and then went on to tell their message. As they had once said to the women, “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen;” so did they now say, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” The angels showed their knowledge of them by calling them “men of Galilee,” and reminded them that they were yet upon earth by recalling their place of birth.

12. *Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olives which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey.*

Brought back to their senses, their reverie over, the apostles at once gird up their loins for active service; they do not need twice telling, but hasten to Jerusalem. The vision of angels has singularly enough brought them back into the world of actual life again, and they obey the command, “Tarry ye at Jerusalem.”

13, 14. *And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*

Can you judge of the sorrow which filled the hearts of the disciples when their Lord was gone from them? They were an army without a leader, a flock without a shepherd, a family without a head. Exposed to innumerable trials, the strong, brazen wall of his presence, which had been round about them, was now withdrawn. In the deep desolation of their spirits they resorted to prayer.

15-19. *And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.*

Judas betrayed his Master; and after having done so, an overwhelming sense of the enormous evil he had committed seized upon him. His guilt buried all hope of repentance, and in the misery of desperation, not the grief of true regret, he confessed his sin to the high priests, crying, “I have sinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us, see thou to that.” Whereupon he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, to show that he could not bear to carry the price of guilt upon him; and left them there. He went out, and was he saved? No. “He went out and hanged himself.” And even then the vengeance of God followed him: for when he had hanged himself he fell from the height where he was suspended, and was dashed to pieces; he was lost, and

his soul perished.

20-26. *For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.*

When they cast lots for an apostle who should succeed the fallen Judas, the lot fell upon Matthias, and he was separated to the work. The lot is directed of God. And if the simple casting of a lot is guided by him how much more the events of our entire life.

Acts 2

We cannot too often read the story of that wondrous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the ray of Pentecost; and let us never read it without asking the Lord to manifest in our midst the fullness of the Spirit's power. We may not have a repetition of the miraculous gifts which were then bestowed upon the apostles and those who were with them; but we may have that gracious influence which shall convince and convert those who gather to hear the Word. Our success in preaching the Word is entirely dependent upon the presence and working of the Holy Spirit;

1. *And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.*

The first lesson that we ought to learn from this inspired record of what happened on the day of Pentecost is, that we cannot expect a revival until there, is unity among Christians. The Spirit of God will not visit and bless a church where there is strife. These disciples in Jerusalem "were all with one accord in one place" "in prayer and supplication," as the fourteenth verse of the previous chapter tells us.

Many of the early writers say that Pentecost was the time when the law was proclaimed upon Mount Sinai. Others think it doubtful; if it be so, it was very significant that on the day when the law was issued amid thunders and lightnings, the gospel—God's new and better law—should be proclaimed with mighty wind and tongues of fire. We are clear, however, that Pentecost was a harvest-festival. On that day the sheaf was waved before the Lord and the harvest consecrated. The Passover was to our Savior the time of his solving, but Pentecost was the day of his reaping, and the fields which were ripe to the harvest when he sat on the well, are reaped now that he sits upon the throne.

2. *And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it felled all the house where they were sitting.*

It is remarkable that both in the Greek and in the Hebrew tongues, the word used for wind and for Spirit is the same. Hence, when the Savior said to Nicodemus "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof," the type might have been suggested to him by the fact of the word pneuma having the double signification of the wind and of the Spirit. The wind is doubtless, chosen as a significant emblem because of its mysteriousness: "Thou canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth;" because of its freeness: "It bloweth where it listeth;" because of diversity of its operations, for the wind blows a gentle zephyr at one moment, and anon it mounts to a howling blast. The Holy Spirit at one time comes to comfort, and at other times to alarm; at one season softly with the promise, and at another time terribly with the threatening.

Observe it was rushing. This pourtrayed the rapidity with which the Spirit's influences spread—rushing like a torrent. Within fifty years from that date of Pentecost, the gospel had been preached in every country of the known world. Paul and his brethren the apostles, had journeyed east, west, north, and south; iron gates had been opened, and bars of brass had been snapped, and the glorious life-living Word had been preached to every creature under heaven for a witness against them. God's spirit does not creep and crawl as too often our unspiritual agencies do, but when he comes, it is a rush, and half the world is lit with divine light before we dream that the match has struck.

Nor is this all, for it was mighty, a wind against which nothing could stand; the house itself might be shaken. They may have been greatly alarmed for fear the house should fall about their heads. The wind was irresistible, and so is the Spirit of God; where he comes, nothing can stand against him.

3. *And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.*

There floated in the room, I think, one mass of flame, a great cloud of fire; this suddenly divided, or was cleft, and separate tongues of fire rested upon the head of each of the disciples. They would understand that thus a divine power was given to them.

Notice that “it sat upon them.” It did not flicker or remove; it remained there. So the Spirit of God is an abiding influence, and the saints shall persevere. It sat upon each of them, so that while there was but one fire, yet each believer received his portion of the one Spirit. There are diversities of operations, but it is the same Lord.

4. *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

The sound was not the Holy Ghost, nor was the tongue of fire the Holy Spirit, these were but the symbols of his work; the real work was done when all present were filled with the Holy Spirit.

When the Lord gave the apostles divers tongues, he did, as it were, give them the keys of the various kingdoms. “Go,” saith he, “Judea is not my only dominion, go and unlock the gates of every empire, here are the keys, you can speak every language.”

5-7. *And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together*

It was a great cause for surprise that men should be able to speak in foreign tongues without any previous instruction. The sound was heard outside the upper room where they were gathered, many pressed to the door to listen, and then went away to tell the strange news, and thus “the multitude came together,”—

and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?

“These men are Jews, and they come from a country district where the people are more than ordinarily illiterate. It is strange that they should be able to speak in foreign languages.”

8. *And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?*

These men, so far from being able to speak many languages, could not by themselves speak even one correctly. The Galilaean dialect was a base degradation of the true Jewish tongue, so that the Galilaeans were always the subject of sneers and scoffings on account of their mispronunciation.

There are several stories in the old Rabbinical writings, all intended to ridicule the Galilaeans; yet these men had now been taught to speak their own language perfectly; and, what was more marvellous still, languages that they had never heard now came pouring forth from their lips with the greatest fluency. How wide the range of those foreign tongues was, we learn from the following verses —

9-11. *Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappodocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.*

Babel's curse was now removed—not by a reversing of God's curse, for God's curses and blessings are both like the laws of the Medes and Persians which never can be altered; men still spoke the tongues of confusion, but the apostles were able to speak to them all after receiving that miraculous gift of tongues. Thus was fulfilled that promise of Jesus, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto my Father;" for Christ never spoke with many tongues, nor did he enable his disciples to do so during his life on earth, but when he had gone back to heaven to his Father, and had received gifts for men, they were enabled to do greater works than he had accomplished by his personal ministry here below.

12, 13. *And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking, said, These men are full of new wine.*

They heard languages which they did not understand as well as those they did understand; so, putting the worst possible construction upon the wondrous scene, they said that the speakers were drunk. It is the mark of a wicked mind when we are ready to attribute evil reasons in the lack of any other. Let us never do this, but always be ready to believe all the good old men that we can.

14. *But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you and hearken to my words:*

A great crowd had gathered in the street, and the apostles, under divine inspiration, addressed them in different tongues, Peter as the leader coming prominently to the front: "Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice." They were twelve witnesses of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, for they had seen him after he had risen, and had eaten with him; they constituted a jury of twelve honest and true men, and Peter as their foreman, "standing up with the eleven," gave their verdict!

15. *For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.*

"It is but nine o'clock in the morning; you cannot really imagine that these men are drunk." We might have thought it hardly worth while to take notice of such an observation; but Peter knew how to conciliate the crowd, and to meet them upon their own ground. He began where they left off, but he went on to say what they little expected to hear:

16–18. *But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servant's and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:*

Every member of the Christian community should be anointed by the Holy

Spirit. The blessing would not simply be given to one here and another there, but there would be a wonderful outpouring that should fall upon the whole multitude of believers.

19, 20. *And I will shew wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:*

Doubtless this refers first to the siege of Jerusalem, when those strange portents were seen in the heavens, and afterwards to that far greater and more notable day of the Lord, the day of judgment, when the moon shall become as blood, and the sun shall become black as sackcloth of hair.

21. *And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

This is a wonderful connection in which to find such a promise as this—a darkened sun, a blood-red moon—yet "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." When the worst comes to the worst, prayer will still be heard, and faith will lead to salvation! O matchless grace of God! Is there not someone here who will call upon God's name now before that evil day comes in all its fullness? "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Oh, that every one of you would lay hold of that promise! It is said that drowning men will catch at a straw. This is no straw, but a gloriously strong life-buoy; only get into it, and it will float you to glory.

Peter was speaking to a Jewish audience, so he began by quoting from the Old Testament. He was wise to win their attention by a long passage out, of one of their own prophets. Now he comes nearer to his main point:

22. *Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:*

Note that Peter does not begin with the Deity of Christ. He will get to that soon; but, like a wise speaker, he commences with points upon which they were all agreed, or which they could not deny. He therefore calls Christ “a man approved of God,” and he reminds them of the “miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him” in their midst. They knew that God had thus attested his mission, so he appealed to them for confirmation: “As ye yourselves also know.”

23. *Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:*

How boldly he puts the truth before his hearers! He charges home the murder of Christ upon them, yet he skilfully softens it by that introduction about “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” This is a very wonderful verse, because it shows us that everything is predetermined and foreknown by God; and yet when men do wickedly, they are responsible for it. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”

There is no man in this world who knows where these two great truths of man’s free agency and divine predestination meet. There have been all sorts of schemes and inventions to make the two doctrines agree; and one set of men has denied one of the truths, and another set has denied the other; but do you nothing of the kind. Believe them both, yet do not pretend that you can reconcile them. It may be that, in another state, with larger capacity of mind than we at present possess, we shall be able to reconcile these two truths. I am not sure that we shall do so; and I do not know that even angels can understand this great mystery; but it is a grand thing to exerciser faith where we cannot comprehend what is revealed to us. He who only believes what he can understand will have a very short creed, and soon he will have none at all; but he who believes what he cannot understand, simply because it is taught him by revelation from God, is the man who walks humbly with his God, and he shall be accepted. I thank God for the mystery that conceals so much from us; where would there be room for faith if all things were as plain as A B C?

24. *Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should he holden of it.*

It was possible for him to die, but it was not possible for him to be held in the bonds of death.

25-27. *For David*

Speaking of Christ in the Psalm which, at first sight, might seem to refer to David himself, but which was even by the Rabbis believed also to refer to the Messiah, and which we know did indeed refer to the Messiah.

Speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: therefore did any heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

David was speaking of Someone who, though he should die, would never in his body feel the natural effect of death, namely decay.

28. *Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.*

Note how Peter keeps to the Old Testament. Those quotations added force to his argument, for his hearers believed the ancient Scriptures to be the very voice of God, and therefore he gave them much of it.

Having quoted from the Psalms, Peter goes on to make this comment upon David's words:

29. *Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.*

Peter craves liberty to speak with freedom, and then he very shrewdly gives to David the high title of patriarch, which is not generally given to him, so as to

win their attention and approval: “Let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day,” and therefore he did not speak about himself in the words Peter was quoting.

29–32. *Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.*

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in the abode of the dead, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

Here Peter appealed to the eleven, and to all the disciples then present who had seen Jesus after he had risen from the dead. It must have been a very impressive sight as they all stood up bearing witness that they had seen the Christ, who was crucified, alive after his death. It was a wonderful public attestation to that grandest of all facts, the raising again from the dead of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.

33. *Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.*

Was not that enough to convince them? They saw and they heard the proofs of the working of the Spirit among them, and Peter told them that “this” was the gift of Christ, who had ascended up on high. It must have been a very striking thing, to have been there, and to have heard and seen these tokens of God setting his seal to the work of Jesus.

Standing up with the eleven apostles, and with the greater company of disciples behind them, it was a noble utterance of Peter: “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”

34, 35. *For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool.*

See how he builds up his argument with clear and cogent reasoning.

36. *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.*

There does not seem very much that is original or striking in that sermon; certainly, it is not a very sensational one; there is no fine metaphor in it, no garnishing of poetry; but, in plain, simple language, Peter proves that it is Jesus Christ of whom David spoke in the Psalms. This was exactly what the people wanted to have proved; many of them were ready to:, receive such proof as that, and they did receive it.

37. *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart*

There is a great distinction between being cut to the heart and being pricked in the heart. Those who were cut to the heart stoned the preacher; but they who are pricked in the heart yield a sweet obedience to the will of God.

and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

These may have been the same people who mockingly said, “These men are full of new wine.” They began badly, but they ended well. I hope none of you have come here to mock; but if you had done so, and then went out pricked in your heart by the truth you had heard, it would be better than coming in an attentive frame of mind, and then going out unimpressed as so many do. God prevent it!

38. *Then Peter said unto them, Repent,*

"Change your mind entirely, be sorry for what you have done, repudiate what you have done by a holy repentance of it: 'Repent,'—

and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,

Peter urged them to repent, and bade them confess their faith by being baptized in God's appointed way.

and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

"You shall be sharers in this wonderful manifestation which has so astounded you."

39. *For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

What promise did Peter mean? Why that promise in the 21st verse, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." That promise is also given to you, my hearers, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even in the most distant heathen land, for the "whosoever" in the promise applies to every one who "shall call on the name of the Lord." Do not therefore shut yourselves out, or try to shut others out, but believe the promise, call upon God, and you shall be saved.

40. *And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Peter first bore witness to the truth, and then pleaded with his hearers to receive his testimony. All true ministers will both "testify and exhort."*

Some are always exhorting; they cry, "Believe, believe," but they do not tell their hearers what is to be believed. Others are always testifying; they preach

good doctrine, but they do not like to exhort sinners to repent, and believe the gospel. Each of these is a one-legged ministry, but we must have two legs to our ministry, and, like Peter, "testify and exhort saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation." "Come out from those who crucified Christ, quit the generation that is guilty of the blood of the Son of God, put your repentance between you and them, put your public baptism between you and them, avow that you belong not to them, but to him whom they crucified, and whom God hath exalted."

41. *Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*

They not only believed what he said, but they were glad to believe it; acknowledging that they had greatly sinned, they rejoiced that there was a promise which covered even their sin: "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Then, having repented and believed, they were baptized upon profession of their faith, according to the true Scriptural order.

42. *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

They believed the doctrine that was taught by the apostles, and they had fellowship with them and with all other Christians with whom they were associated. They did not try to go to heaven by some underground railway without confessing Christ; but, having confessed their faith in Christ they further manifested their devotion to him "in breaking of bread, and in prayers." I do not know how many prayer-meetings they had, they must have kept on praying, and praising, and preaching pretty well all day long.

43–45. *And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*

What a notable instance this was of the power of divine grace! We should not

usually suppose that the Jewish race would be given to any excess of making common property; but where grace came in the first flush of its dawn, see to what prodigies of liberality it excited the early believers. Would that we had more of this generous spirit nowadays!

46. *And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,*

I believe that wherever two or three disciples of Christ meet together it is competent for them to celebrate the Lord's supper. That ordinance is not, as some think it to be a church ordinance, to be confined to the official assembling of all believers; but wherever two or three are met in Christ's name, there he is; and where he is, there may the emblems of his broken body and shed blood be partaken of in memory of him.

47. *Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

May he do the like unto all our churches, and he shall have the glory world without end! Amen.

Acts 3

1. *Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.*

Peter and John seem to have been linked in closest friendship. Peter had been brought back by John when he was almost despairing after having denied his Master. John lovingly found him out, and made him his associate; and now they "went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer." Observe, here, how very sweetly the Old Testament dispensation melts into the new. The Temple was no longer what it had been before; the type was of no further use now that the great Antitype of the Temple had come; yet these apostles still went up to it at the hour of prayer. There are some men who are great at destroying. It will be time to destroy the old when the new is quite ready; and even then, it may be very possible to let the darkness gradually melt away into a twilight, and so the day shall come with no great gap, no marked surprise. So Peter and John went up to the Temple at the same hour as others went. It is folly to he singular, except when to be singular is to be something more right than others.

2, 3. *And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms eye them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.*

This seems to have been the custom about the Temple gates, as it is about the doors of many churches on the Continent. For instance, you could not approach the door of a certain church in Rome without being solicited, perhaps, by a score of beggars. I do not suppose that it was so in Judea in its prosperous days; but when religion does not prosper, beggars are sure to be multiplied; and now that the very spirit of godliness had gone, almsgiving was done in public, and hence

the beggars appeared in public.

4. *And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.*

The way that Peter and John went to work was very wise; the man could not walk, but he could look, so they first of all called his attention to themselves by saying, "Look on us," in order that he might be ready to listen to their message, and might know what they said, partly by seeing what they did, for, in hearing, though we cannot hear with our eyes, yet, somehow, the eye mightily helps when the preacher has any kind of action whatsoever; and Peter needed to have action in his sermon on this occasion.

5. *And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give to thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.*

He did not omit either of our Lord's names, nor did he flinch from telling the Jews that it was the same Jesus whom they had despised, and called the Nazarene, or the man of Nazareth. Peter here seems to say, "They shall not think that I am speaking of another Jesus, or of another Christ; it shall be 'Jesus Christ.' Neither shall they imagine that there may be another anointed Jesus, but it shall be 'Jesus Christ of Nazareth.'"

7. *And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.*

The man had never stood upon his feet in all his life, and was so unable to move that he had to be carried to the Temple gates to beg; and yet, at the mention of the great and glorious name of Jesus, his feet and ankle-bones immediately received strength.

8. *And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.*

You know that you have to teach your children to walk; as they gather strength,

they acquire the art, for there is an art in it; and I should suppose that, if a man had been lame from his birth, and a surgeon could suddenly make his ankle-bones strong, he would not be able to walk. He would not know what to do with his legs, having never used them; certainly, he would be exceedingly awkward in his first movements; but this man went through his gymnastic lessons very rapidly when the miracle was wrought upon him, for he walked, he ran, he leaped, to the glory of God, and that all on a sudden.

9-11. *And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.*

You are not at all surprised that he held Peter and John; it was but natural that he should follow them wherever they went, for he owed so much to them, and they were the best friends that he had ever had. He was filled with reverence for them because of what they had wrought upon him; and now, lest they should go away, he held them; and "all the people ran together unto them, greatly wondering." He who was healed by Christ"s wonderful name was wondering, and the people who saw him healed were all wondering. I suppose that wonder mingles with all true worship. All wonder is not worship; but where there is adoration of God, and a sense of his great goodness and of our unworthiness, there seems always to be a large amount of wonder.

12. *And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?*

Peter could well see that the people attributed to himself and John more than was right, so he thus had an opportunity of preaching the gospel to them, and you may be certain that he did not miss it.

13-15. *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of*

our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus,

Or, rather, as you have it in the Revised Version with more correctness, "hath glorified his Servant Jesus," for his Son may be said to he glorified already. But Jesus had taken upon himself the form of a servant, and God had "glorified his Servant Jesus;"—

Whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

Peter will have it that the God of the gospel is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. I do not hesitate to say that the god of a large number of professors now is not the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; and the reason I say so is this—that they often treat the Old Testament as if it were an altogether secondary volume, and speak about the imperfect ideas of God which the Hebrews had, and the imperfect revelation of God in the Old Testament. I believe that Jehovah—that very Jehovah who clave the Red Sea, and drowned the Egyptians—the terrible God of the Old Testament—is the same God who is the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; and we are to take the Godhead as it is revealed, not alone in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament also. There are some who would pick and choose that part of Scripture which they like best, and construct a god for themselves out of those chosen texts. These be they who have other gods before Jehovah; and these be they who make unto themselves an image which, if it be not graven upon stone, is yet made out of their own imaginations, which they set up, and worship in the place of the one living and true God.

"The God of our fathers hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied." See how plain-spoken Peter is—how boldly he presses home upon the crowd around him the murder of Christ—the rejection of the Messiah! It took no small amount of courage and faith to speak like that, and to speak so to persons who were full of admiration of him before, and who would be pretty sure to be filled with indignation against him directly. A man can speak boldly against those who are his enemies; but, when people begin to flatter you, and admire

you, a softness steals over the bravest heart, and he is inclined to be very gentle. I admire Peter that he puts it thus plainly: “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.”

16. *And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know, yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.*

The same power that made all worlds lies hidden in that name. The power that will raise the dead, and make new heavens and a new earth, is in that name, saving this poor fallen world from all its degradation, unswathing the planet of all the mists that now surround it, and bidding it shine forth, like all its sister stars, to the glory of God who made it.

17. *And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.*

How like his Master does Peter now speak! Instead of drawing his sword, as he did when he cut off the ear of Malchus, he puts the truth thus mildly: “I wot that through ignorance ye did it.”

18, 19. *But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;*

The apostle Peter, addressing the crowd, said to them, “Change your minds; be sorry for what you have done; forsake your old ways; be turned; become new men.” That was his message put it into other words.

We tell men to repent and believe, not because we rely on any power in them to do so, for we know them to be dead in trespasses and sins; not because we depend upon any power in our earnestness or in our speech to make them do so,

for we understand that our preaching is less than nothing apart from God; but because the gospel is the mysterious engine by which God converts the hearts of men, and we find that, if we speak in faith, God the Holy Ghost operates with us, and while we bid the dry bones live, the Spirit makes them live—while we tell the lame man to stand on his feet, the mysterious energy makes his ankle-bones to receive strength—while we tell the impotent man to stretch out his hand, a divine power goes with the command, and the hand is stretched out and the man is restored.

20-23. *And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise my unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.*

Hear this, then, you who have heard Christ, through his Word and through his servants, and have heard him preach—ay, scores and hundreds of times. Let me read this text to you again; and as I read it, may it sink into your hearts. “It shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”

24–26. *Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*

They were to have the first proclamation of the gospel; from among them would be gathered many of the first converts. The preacher did not know immediately what result this sermon produced; it was not like the sermon preached at

Pentecost, for he did know what happens after its delivery.

This is quite as good a sermon every way, and we have every reason to believe that as many were converted by it. The Spirit of God was with Peter; yet even the Spirit of God, does not always work in the came way upon men. You see, the apostles had no opportunity to have a talk with the people afterwards, and to find out what had been done, as they had on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 4

1–4. *And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.*

So that, though they could not tell there and then how many were converted, and though they could not baptize them at once, for they were taken away, yet, though there was no after-meeting, there were probably just as many saved as at Pentecost. Just as grand a result came of it. You cannot judge of the result of a sermon on the particular day that it is preached; it may seem as if that sermon had produced no effect, and it may be so; but, still, this time it was not so. Whenever you go home sad that you have not had an after-meeting, or you are interrupted, and cannot tell what good was done, though you do not know what has been accomplished, the record is in heaven, and God will reveal it by-and-by; and, peradventure, even here you will discover that you made a mistake, and that the service which seemed lost was one of the most blessed that you ever conducted. God grant that it may be so, for Christ's sake!

5-7. *And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?*

Peter and John were summoned before the priests to give an account for having healed the lame man, and for having preached in the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

8–12. *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people and elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole: Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*

Nothing can exceed the directness, the comprehensiveness, and the boldness of this statement. He not only declares the name of Christ to be the wonder-working name, but he charges them with his murder, re-asserts the resurrection; nay, further, he cuts at the root of all their ceremonial righteousness, and declares that they must be saved by this hated and despised name, or else perish fore ever. Under all circumstances, let the servant of God behave himself boldly. Let him remember that this is hour he ought always to speak, and that when the honor of his Master and the welfare of souls are concerned, it is not for him to withhold, but to speak out the truth.

13. *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*

Where else could such holy courage have been learned? They spake in their measure just as the great Master did, of whom it is written: “He spoke as one having authority, and not an the Scribes.” They did not speak with the timid, hesitating manner of a preacher who seems to hold the balance of probabilities between the right and the wrong, the false and the true, but with the demonstration of a hearty conviction of the truth of the principles which they uttered. So Christ spoke, and, having learned of him, so spake his disciples.

14. *And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.*

Converts shut the mouths of adversaries. The good done by the gospel will always be a dumb-foundering argument to the ungodly.

16–20. *But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem: and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

Like the vessel full of new wine, which must have vent or burst, so is the man who is filled with the knowledge of Jesus. He must speak. He must "tell to others round, what a dear Savior he has found."

It is no matter of choice with him, for, as Paul says, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." As the old prophet hath it, "The word of the Lord was as fire in my bones," and if it be the true word of God, it will soon burn its way out.

21–22. *So when they had farther threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.*

Therefore, it was the more remarkable, forty years lame and yet healed! But how great is the grace displayed in the salvation of an aged sinner—forty years dead in trespasses and in sins—fifty, sixty seventy, or even eighty years, a faithful

servant of the black tyrant and yet made to follow the new and better Master! What a triumph of grace is that which snatches the sere brand out of the burning when it is so fitted for the fire!

23. *And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.*

You can always tell a man by his company, Had these people been ungodly, they would have done as the ungodly do when they come out of prison: they would have gone off to their old pot-companions. But they are believers, and they go to their own company.

24–28. *And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: Who by the mouth of they servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determine before to be done.*

How strangely this doctrine of predestination comes in just there! They are singing of the wickedness of men, and the triumph which God gets over it, and so this in the very sum and substance of the song, that when wicked men think that God's decrees will be for ever put away by the destruction of his Son, they themselves are then actually doing what God had "determined before to be done." The wildest discord makes harmony in the ear of God. Man may be in rebellion against the Most High, but he is still abjectly the slave of God's predestination, and let man sin with his free will, even to the very extremest length of folly, yet even then God hath a bit in his mouth and a bridle upon his jaws, and knows how to rule and govern him according to his own good pleasure. The ferocity of kings and priests doth but fulfill the counsel of God.

29, 30. *And now, Lord, behold their threatenings and grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word. By stretching forth thine hand to heal: and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of the holy child Jesus.*

How precious is it to see Jesus as made in all points like unto his people, and how rapturous for his people to see their Redeemer's features drawn by the pencil of fellowship in themselves. Trial is often sanctified to this noble end. Let the world oppress the Church; let the members of that Church be thoroughly weaned from any other ground of comfort; let the Lord Jesus be their only rock and refuge, and they will soon perceive analogies in the history of Christ beautifully explaining their own—analogies which they never would have discovered except in the glare of the furnace. In the chapter before us, the apostles are thrown back upon the person of Jesus for comfort, and they revel in the thought of his being a child, because they discover in this his likeness to the Church, which, in its infancy, the enemy sought to destroy, even as Herod sought to slay the new-born King of the Jews.

31. *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together: and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.*

Yes, all the persecutions of the separate members should be recorded in prayer before God, and if the whole Church itself should fall into disrepute through misrepresentation, or through the natural hostility of all men to the Church of God, then should it resort to its Great Friend for its defense.

32-37. *And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made*

unto every man according as he had need. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

They loved each other so much that, if one was poor, his rich brothers helped him. They felt as if they were all fused into one body by the intense heat of love to Christ; and there are many, many, many similar cases now, (I speak what I do know,) in which believers have received help and succor, which they never would have had if it had not been for the name and love of Christ.

Acts 5

1-4. *But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.*

Ananias and Sapphira were not bound to give any money to the apostles when they did give, and they certainly were not bound to give: all that they had; but they came, and said they had given all they received for their land, and because they lied unto God, they were struck dead there and then. They lied not unto men, which would have been sin enough, but in lying to the church officers they lied unto God, and the result was their sudden death.

5-11. *And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost:*

and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

That solemn judgment set a wall of fire round about the Church, so that ungodly persons dared not hypocritically come to be united with them. And so will God do to his Church now. The traveler, when he wishes to keep out the wild beasts, makes a ring of fire, and then the lion is shut out; and God makes a ring of fire round his Church, and the enemy is kept at a distance.

12-16. *And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.) Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.*

The shadow of Peter healed the sick, and so the shadow of the Saviour when he is coming to a soul begins to heal it. Why, I have known some who have been blessed by the very shadow of Christ. I mean, that before they were actually converted, before the new heart and the right spirit were given to them, the very shadow of Christ, at least more or less, made them desire to change their ways.

17, 18. *Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.*

The second persecution of the church, in which all the apostles were put into the

common prison, was mainly brought about by the sect of the Sadducees. These, as you know, were the Broad School, the liberals, the advanced thinkers, the modern-thought people of the day. If you want a bitter sneer, a biting sarcasm, or a cruel action, I commend you to these large-minded gentlemen. They are liberal to everybody, except to those who hold the truth; and for those they have a reserve of concentrated bitterness which far excels wormwood and gall.

That which had been done deserved their admiration, but received their indignation. Such gentlemen as these can be warm at a very short notice, when the doctrine of the cross is spreading, and God the Holy Spirit is bearing witness with signs following. Let them display their indignation, it is according to their nature.

19, 20. *But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.*

I should have been tempted to linger a little just to find out how the angel released the prisoners. He had opened the doors, so we are told, but yet they were found closed and fastened when the officers came, and the sentries had not left their posts. Here is a mystery; I should like to clear it up. Are there not many such mysteries? But the command is pressing and peremptory: “Go, speak to the people.” “Let me tarry; one does not see angels every day. Let me stay and take in a more complete idea of the heavenly stranger. Indulge me with a little conversation with one who has seen my Lord. There are a great many questions which I would fain have answered.” We perhaps are tempted to study very deeply into mysterious points which do not minister to profit; let us, then, hear the angel say, “Go, speak to the people.”

21-29. *And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught.*

They did go, so that they were in the temple courts early in the morning. The first beams of the sun that were reflected from the golden roof met their eyes. The first worshippers in those hallowed courts heard the apostles testifying of Jesus and his love.

But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

These apostles were the representatives of Messiah the Prince, acting under his authority, and, so, far as they could, filling up the gap caused by his absence. They asserted that their preaching and teaching had been done by divine command, which could not be set aside by any human authority, imperial or ecclesiastical; and that the true Prince of Israel the Son of David, alone had the power and the right to issue commissions to those who owned allegiance to Jehovah. They declared that Jesus, whom, the chief priests had crucified, was still alive reigning in glory, enthroned at the right hand of God, and that they were only fulfilling his royal commands when they were "standing in the temple, and teaching the people."

30. *The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.*

The resurrection of Christ secured the justification of believers, and also

guaranteed their resurrection from the dead by virtue of their union with him. If the resurrection were more fully preached at this time, I am sanguine that it would be a powerful means of conversion.

The apostles boldly spoke of our Lord's death, for they said to the council, "Whom ye slew and hanged on a tree." They had mentioned the precious blood; for the high priest said, "Ye intend to bring this man's blood upon us." Leave out the satisfaction made by Christ for sin, leave out the doctrine of a real and effective substitution, and you have left out of the gospel "the blood which is the life thereof." "The words of this life" are not preached to the people where the cross is put in the background.

31. *Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*

The title of "prince" in our Lord's case signifies not only honor, but actual power. His is no nominal princedom—he has both glory and strength. Unto him is given the mediatorial kingdom, which includes all power in heaven and in earth, so that he is well styled "the blessed and only Potentate." Was it not said of old, "The government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace?" He is the Prince of the house of David, he openeth and no man shutteth; he shutteth and no man openeth.

32. *And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.*

These apostles were the representatives of Messiah the Prince, acting under his authority, and, so, far as they could, filling up the gap caused by his absence. They asserted that their preaching and teaching had been done by divine command, which could not be set aside by any human authority, imperial or ecclesiastical; and that the true Prince of Israel the Son of David, alone had the power and the right to issue commissions to those who owned allegiance to Jehovah.

33. *When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel*

to slay them.

To the Jewish priests and rulers this was a dreadful announcement. They could not endure to hear that Jesus, whom they slew and hanged on a tree, was yet alive. As the murderer is startled at the apparition of the ghost of the man he has slain, so were these rulers altogether dismayed at the idea that Jesus of Nazareth, whom they had nailed to the cross, was risen from the grave; and they were astounded at the very thought that he whom they had put to death with all the shame that they could devise was with the full might and majesty of God exalted to the highest heavens. They were cut to the heart by the announcement as though a sword had cut them in twain, dividing their very bones. Full of indignation, they consulted how they could compass the death of those who had brought such evil tidings to their ears.

34-39. *Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; and said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men. For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.*

The advice of the Jewish orator was very sensible. When you see a new enterprise, some brethren very enthusiastic attempting something you cannot quite approve of, do not stand in their way. Let them have a fair trial; there is one at the helm who understands how to manage better than we do. Let them alone; if God has not the work in hand, it will come to nought, and if it should be God’s work then surely it will stand.

40, 41. *And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*

Shall we who owe as much to our Lord as they be less willing to deny ourselves and to resist even unto blood, striving against sin? May the Spirit dwell in us so richly that for us to live may be Christ and not self at all. May we count all things but loss for Christ's sake. May we never pine at the hardness of our lot, or the extremity of our grief, if we are bearing hardness for Jesus' sake, but rather rejoice that we are counted worthy to take part in such a cause.

42. *And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*

It appears that the one subject upon which men preached in the apostolic age was Jesus Christ. The tendency of man, if left alone is continually to go further and further from God, and the Church of God itself is no exception to the general rule. For the first few years during and after the apostolic era, Christ Jesus was preached, but gradually the Church departed from the central point, and began rather to preach ceremonials and church offices than the person of their Lord.

In the days of Paul it was not difficult at once, in one word, to give the sum and substance of the current theology. It was Christ Jesus. Had you asked anyone of those disciples what he believed, he would have replied, "I believe Christ." If you had requested him to show you his Body of Divinity, he would have pointed upward reminding you that divinity never had but one body, the suffering and crucified human frame of Jesus Christ, who ascended up on high. To them, Christ was not a notion refined, but unsubstantial; not an historical personage who had left only the savor of his character behind, but whose person was dead; to them he was not a set of ideas, not a creed, nor an incarnation of an abstract theory, but he was a person, one whom some of them had seen, whose hands they had handled nay one of whose flesh they had all been made to eat, and of whose blood they had spiritually been made to drink. Christ was substance to them, I fear he is too often but shadow to us.

Acts 6

1. *And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.*

There had been a little trouble in the church; some had thought one thing, some had thought another. There appeared to have been a just cause for complaint.

2. *Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.*

It is no small matter to be able to bear a burden for another if he is thereby set free for more eminent service than we could ourselves perform. If it be so that I cannot preach myself, yet if I can take away from one who does preach certain cares which burden him, if I thus enable him to preach the more and the better, I am virtually preaching myself.

3-7. *Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in*

Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

The apostles, conciliatory in their temper, and earnest in their endeavor to keep the church together, as all true ministers should be, proposed the election of seven men who should distribute the contributions impartially among the poor. This was agreed to and acted upon by the entire assembly, and straightway the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul. Well might great grace rest upon them all, for they loved each other with a pure heart fervently.

8-10. *And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.*

Although the onerous duty of serving tables might well have excused him from other service, we soon find him, full of faith and power, doing great wonders and miracles among the people; and not even content with that, we see him defending the faith against a synagogue of subtle philosophical deniers of the truth. These, with their allies, made the valiant deacon the object of their attack, and he at once rose to be an irresistible witness for the gospel. Stephen the deacon became Stephen the preacher. This holy man not only used such gifts as he had in one department, but having abilities for a more spiritual form of service, he laid them at once upon the altar of Christ.

11-15. *Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change*

the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

If you desire a glimpse of what we shall be in heaven, remember the face of Moses when it glowed so that he covered it with a veil! remember Stephen's face when they looked upon him and saw as it were the face of an angel! remember our Lord transfigured till he was whiter than any fuller could make him! Those were transient gleams and glimpses of the beatific glory, which shall surround and environ every one of the blessed are long.

Acts 7

1. *Then said the high priest, Are these things so?*

If you read the seventh chapter through, you might think it was delivered from this pulpit to an audience as affectionate, appreciating, and attentive as you may be: it does not read like an address delivered to a furious mob of bigots, gnashing their teeth at the lone, brave man. In calm, cool, deliberate, bold, stinging language, he deals with them fearlessly and without reserve. He takes the sharp knife of the Word and rips up the sins of the people, laying open the inward parts of their hearts, and the secrets of their souls: between the joints and the marrow he deliberately inserts the two-edged sword, and discovers the thoughts and intents of their hearts. Re could not have delivered that searching address with greater fearlessness had he been assured that they would thank him for the operation; the fact that his death was certain had no other effect upon him than to make him yet more zealous. What secret spirit helped him thus to speak? Had he prepared that speech with long elaboration and forethought? Had that oration been carefully composed, revised, and learned by heart? Far from it. He was not so unmindful of our Savior's words. "But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." Seized upon, doubtless, without previous notice, and dragged before the council without being allowed a moment for deliberation, Stephen stood up and defended himself, and the truth as it is in Jesus, with all the skill of a practiced debater, with all the deliberation of one laboriously prepared, and with all the vigor of one whose zeal was like a fire in his bones. To what do we trace this mouth and wisdom, which his enemies could not gainsay? To what, indeed, but to the Holy Spirit?

2-17. *And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in*

Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. And God spake on this wise, that his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulcher that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt,

Note those words, "the time of the promise," and remember that every promise has its due time of fulfillment, and that there is a time of promise, to all the

Lord's chosen people, when he will surely bring them out of bondage into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

18–20. *Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. The came dealt subtily with our kindred, and evil entreated our father, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months:*

In the darkest night of Israel's bondage in Egypt, her star of hope arose: "Moses was born, and was exceeding fair;" or, as the margin has it, "was fair to God,"—with a beauty something more than human.

21, 22. *And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.*

He was well qualified for the work to which God had called him, but how much more fully qualified is that great Prophet, like unto Hoses, whom God has raised up, in these latter days, for the salvation of men, even Jesus Christ his Son! He knows more than all the learning and wisdom of the Egyptians, he knows more than the cleverness of the devil, so he can deliver us from all his crafty wiles.

23–25. *And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not.*

Alas! it is just the same with Israel now. The Lord Jesus came to his own, and, according to one of his parables, the Father said of him, "They will reverence my Son;" but they did nothing of the kind; they said, "This is the Heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours." And, alas! how many, nowadays, are

imitating their evil example! They say, “We will not have this man to reign over us;” they refuse to yield themselves to the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ.

26–30. *And the next day he chewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sire, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust ham away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday! Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons. And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a game of fire in a bush. So that he was eighty years of age when he really began his great lifework.*

Perhaps, as a rule, the larger part of our time is occupied in getting ready to work. Yet, if we are able to perform a word as good as that which Moses did, it will well repay us for a long season of preparation.

31–34. *When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. I have seen, I have seen the addiction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down, to deliver them.*

All this must have been very pleasant to the ear of Moses; it was solemn, yet it was exceedingly sweet; but notice what comes next:

And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.

Oh, dear! what a falling-off there seems to be in these words! God first says, “I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them;” and then he

adds, “I will send thee into Egypt.” Yes, truly, from the grandeur of the divine working down to the insignificance of our instrumentality, is a tremendous stoop; yet the God who says, “I will save sinners by my grace; none but myself can save them;” also says to me, “Go thou, and preach the gospel to them.” The same Lord who says, “I will change the heart of stone into a heart of mesh, and work a miracle of mercy in renewing those who are dead in trespasses and sins,” also says to you, “Speak to the persons sitting with you in the pew, and seek to point them to the Savior.” It is a wonderful stoop, but it is the condescension of almighty grace, and it brings great honor to the poor, trembling, unworthy person to whom the message is addressed. Moses thought himself very unfit for the task of delivering Israel, and he would, if he had dared to do so, have refrained from that task; but God said to him, “Now come, I will send thee into Egypt.” Ah, brethren! how different a man did Moses then become! When he went out by himself, without any commission, he was impatient to get to his work, and he slew an Egyptian, and so had to flee away out of the country; but when he was sent in God’s name, when the Lord said to him, “Now come, I will send thee,” then the work was accomplished. O my brethren, in your service for the Savior, always seek for power from on high! Ask to be sent of God, and pray your Master to go with you; then will you succeed in the task which he entrusts to you.

35. *This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the came did God send to he a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.*

Is not that a shadow of that grander truth, “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner”?

36, 37. *He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.*

This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord pour God raise up unto you of pour brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

Now you see that Moses was thus a type of Christ. God grant that we may not

reject Christ, as the Israelites rejected Moses; but may we be willing that he should be to us our Judge and our Deliverer!

38, 39. *This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: to whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,*

Though Moses had brought them out of Egypt, they were not obedient to him, and they wanted to go back to the land of bondage. And, ah! brethren, this is the great crime of the present day, the crime of mankind in general, that, after all Jesus has done, there is still within so many the evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

40, 41. *Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we not not what is become of Aim. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.*

This again is another of the ways by which men attempt to make an idol god out of something which they can see, and to rejoice in what they themselves do instead of trusting in what the Lord Jesus has done.

42, 43. *Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; is it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.*

There was still idolatry in their hearts, and Moses was rejected by them. God grant that we may not be idolaters, and so reject the Prophet, like unto Moses, whom the Lord has sent unto us!

44-50. *Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?*

Notice how Stephen's mind clung only to that which is purely spiritual. All ritualism was clean gone from him. I dare say at one time Stephen felt a great reverence for the temple; the first Jewish Christians still continued to feel a measure of that awe of the temple which, as Jews, they had formerly indulged; but Stephen says, "Howbeit the Host High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord; or what is the place of my rest? "It is noteworthy how the saints, when they are near to die, make very little of what others make a great deal of. What is ritual to a dying man?—a man with his eyes opened, looking into the future, and about to meet his God? Sacraments are poor supports in the dying hour. Priestcraft, where is it? The reed has snapped beneath the weight of a burdened conscience, and the tremendous realities of death and judgment.

51-53. *Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.*

His God absorbs all his thoughts; and he tells how his God had sent Joseph, but his brethren persecuted him; his God had sent Moses, but they rebelled against

him; his God had now sent Jesus, and they had been his betrayers and murderers. He had pity upon them in his heart, that is clearly seen in his dying prayer for them, but still his main feeling is sympathy with God in the rebellions which he had endured from the ungodly.

54. *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.*

They grin at him, they howl at him, but what matters that to him? He will be put to a blasphemer's death outside the city by the hands of cruel men; but that daunts him not. His face glows with joy unspeakable, he looks not like a man hurried to his execution, but as one on the way to a wedding. He looks like an immortal angel rather than a man condemned to die.

55, 56. *But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.*

At first he was probably in the council hall of the Sanhedrim, but the vision seemed to divide the roof, to roll away the firmament, and set open the gates of heaven, so that into its innermost chambers the anointed eye was able to gaze. It is said he saw the Son of Man. Now this is the only place in Scripture where Jesus is called the Son of Man by any one but himself. He frequently called himself the Son of Man, that was indeed a common name for himself, but his disciples did not call him so. Perhaps the glory of the rejected Messiah as man was the peculiar thought which was to be conveyed to Stephen's mind, to assure him that as the despised Lord had at length triumphed, so also should his persecuted servant. At all times it is a gladsome sight to see the representative man exalted to the throne of God, but it was peculiarly suitable for this occasion, for the Lord himself had warned his enemies, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power." He had spoken those words to the very men who now heard Stephen bear witness that it was even so.

Stephen saw his Lord standing; now our Lord is generally described as sitting, but it was as if the sympathizing Lord had risen up to draw near to his suffering servant, eager both to sustain him and to receive him when the conflict was over.

Jesus rose from the throne to gaze upon himself suffering again in the person of one of his beloved members. The place occupied by the Lord was at the right hand of God." Stephen distinctly saw the ineffable brightness of eternal glory, which no human eye can see until strengthened by superior grace, and amid that glory he saw the Son of Man in the place of love, power, and honor, worshipped and adored.

Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

According to the Jewish law, the witnesses were bound to be the first throwers of the stones. They were, in fact, the leading executioners, for they gave evidence against the accused, and on their witness he was condemned to death. They had to take the responsibility of his death, and to throw the first stones. In order to do this, they took off their long flowing robes, and, casting them down, they left them in the charge of one who, would appear to have been much delighted with the death of Stephen, as he had probably given his vote against him in the Sanhedrin, and was looking on to see that the dreadful murder was fully accomplished.

Stephen dying is the seed out of which Paul springs up. What a privilege so to die that a phoenix may rise out of our ashes! If we have been useful ourselves up to the measure of a moderate ability, we may, as we die, call forth greater workers than ourselves; our expiring spark may kindle the divine light in some flaming beacon, which far across the seas shall scatter the beams of gospel light. And why not? God grant that we may, both in life and in death, serve him well. I would that even in our ashes might live our former lives, that being dead we yet may speak.

59. *And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.*

He felt that his spirit was about to leave the body to fly into the unknown world. Perhaps a shiver came over him of natural awe at the great mystery, even as it comes over us when we think of being disrobed of the familiar garment of our

body; but he placed his unclothed spirit in the hands of Jesus, and his fear and care were over.

60. *And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*

In Stephen we see Jesus imitated, the death of Stephen is a reproduction of the death of Jesus; let us hope that ours will be the same. It was so, even in little circumstances. Jesus died without the gate, so did Stephen; Jesus died praying, so did Stephen; Jesus died saying, “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit;” Stephen cannot approach God absolutely, but he approaches him through the Mediator, and he says, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Christ dies pleading for his murderers, so does Stephen—“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” Stephen’s death was radiant with the glow of his Lord’s brightness. Christ was glorified and reflected in him.

And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

When they had dragged him outside the gate, and stripped off their clothes to carry out his execution, he did not let fall a single timorous word or trembling cry; he stood up and committed his soul to God with calmness, and when the first murderous stones felled him to the earth he rose to his knees, still not to ask for pity, nor to utter a craven cry, but to plead with his Lord for mercy upon his assailants; then, closing his eyes like a child tired out with the sport of a long summer’s day, and drops asleep upon its mother’s lap, “he fell asleep.”

Stephen died like a conqueror. His name was Stephanos, or crown, and truly that day he not only received a crown, but he became the crown of the church as her first martyr. He was the conqueror, not his enemies. They stoned his body, but his soul had vanquished them. It was not in their power to move him; his quiet look defied their fury. He went home to his God to hear it said, “Servant of God, well done,” and in nothing had his foes despoiled him on the way thither. He was more than a conqueror through him that loved him.

Acts 8

1. *And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.*

Saul, having tasted blood in the murder of Stephen, became more and more furious in his persecution of the Church of Christ at Jerusalem, and the brethren had to escape for their lives. They all did so, except the apostles, who were specially cared for by divine providence.

2. *And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentations over him.*

As well they might, for his death was a serious loss to the Church. He was one of the best workers for Christ of that day; and when he was thus put to death by the judicial murder of stoning, the devout men who were spared to mourn his loss "made great lamentation over him."

3. *As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and having men and women committed them to prison.*

At first, we can hardly believe that this was the very man who afterwards became the greatest preacher of the gospel, and the builder up of the Church of Christ, but it was even so. He was always earnest in whatever he did. When he persecuted, he did it with all his might; and when he became converted, then he preached with all his might. He was a thoroughgoing man. I like these thorough-going men; they are worth saving. When they are converted, they bring great

glory to God. The next verse tells us one effect of the havoc wrought by Saul—

4. *Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*

They might have stopped at Jerusalem, and made a comfortable and strong church there, if they had not been persecuted; but, being scattered abroad, they were like seed in every furrow of the field: “they went every where preaching the word.” Now, out of this church, there is a continual drain of brethren and sisters, who leave their native land to go to distant colonies; such are the exigencies of the times, that many have to go abroad. I charge you, wherever you go, carry the holy seed with you. Be yourselves a seed for Christ in every land.

5. *Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.*

Philip is mentioned as going down to Samaria to preach; but Philip was originally set apart to attend to the distribution of the alms of the church. It is good for every man to attend to his own special office; but where that office ceases to be needful, let him get to that work which is common and constant.

Now Philip was a Jew, and he might have said—perhaps he did say—that he was a very unlikely person to succeed in Samaria, for the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, and the Samaritans did not care to have any dealings with the Jews. Jew or no Jew, Philip is sent to preach the gospel, and to preach it to every creature, and therefore he goes to Samaria.

6. *And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.*

We cannot tell how far the soft had been prepared for the sowing of the gospel seed by our Lord’s visit to Sychar, a city of Samaria. The influence of the converts in that place may have inclined the people of the city of Samaria to give the more heed to the preaching of Philip. The work of a great and good man may seem sometimes to die out, but its effects remain, and extend beyond the place where he labored.

7, 8. *For unclear spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.*

There was joy in Samaria because the gospel was preached there. If men did but know it, the greatest boon a city can have is to have the gospel preached in it. Remember the old motto of the city of Glasgow, "Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the Word." No city flourishes so well as that which has a clear, powerful, gospel bell ringing in the midst of it. It is a famishing city which has not the bread of life; but it is a flourishing city which has the bread of life freely dispensed from the pulpit every Sabbath day by loving hands.

But there was still more joy in Samaria because there were signs of blessing going with the gospel. Unclean spirits were driven out of those who had been possessed by them, and lame and paralyzed persons were made to walk. We work no such miracles now, in the physical world, but we work them in the spiritual realm; out of many men have we seen the evil spirits go as the cup of devils has been abandoned. Filthy blasphemy has been given up, and their speech has been seasoned with salt. Fornication has been forsaken, uncleanness of life has been hated and left, theft and dishonesty of every kind have become detestable.

9-11. *But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, this man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.*

And there are those in all ages who set up to be prophets, and who seek to draw men after them, of whom it is well to beware.

12–13. *But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also:*

Simon believed after a certain style and fashion. He saw that there was a real power about Philip, which he did not himself possess, and he was obliged to bow down before the manifest presence of God.

13–17. *And when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.*

That is to say, they received a share of those miraculous gifts which attended the introduction of the gospel of Christ. It has therefore been supposed that certain superior persons should visit the churches, and lay their hands upon people. So they should, if they have the power to bestow such a gift as Peter and John gave; but to lay empty hands on the heads of men and women, is a vain ceremony. When the apostles laid their hands on these converts in Samaria, they received the Holy Ghost.

18–24. *And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.*

The execrable name of Simon Magus is another proof that the church of Christ

in her most zealous estate, cannot expect to be clear of the basest of men. He expressed no desire to be delivered from his evil way, but only to be screened from the consequences of it. Every knave cries out against punishment; but he is attaining to honesty who entreats to be freed from his pilfering habits.

25, 26. *And they when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.*

Philip, who had been so useful to the multitude, must now be of service to a solitary individual. My dear brethren, if you can gather a crowd of people together, preach the gospel to them; but if you cannot do that, preach the gospel to one person, if you can only reach one. It was a desert, but the angel of the Lord bade Philip go there.

27. *And he arose and went:*

Not demurring, but at once obeying. If the Lord should send you to the wilderness, depend upon it that he will send somebody else there for you to bless; go, therefore, without fear.

27, 28. *And, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.*

He was a devout man, who was seeking rest of heart, but he could not find it. He had joined in all the solemn services of the Jewish fall, but as yet he had not discovered the great secret of eternal life. He was still searching for it; and as he rode along the rough road, he was reading the Book of the prophet Essias.

29, 30. *Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to*

this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

That is the main thing; a religion that is not based upon understanding will soon come to an end. An emotional religion—one that is nothing but emotion—will be temporary and transient religion; so Philip enquired of the eunuch, "Understandest thou what thou readest?"

31. *And he said, now can I accept some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.*

See how God honors the Christian ministry by making even his Word to be in some respects insufficient for some men; at any rate, they need that some living voice should come and guide them into the meaning of it.

32, 33. *The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.*

Does it not strike you as being remarkable that he should be reading at that moment the best text that Philip could have selected? He had reached a portion of Scripture from which, without the slightest digression, the evangelist preached unto him Jesus as the slain lamb, the willing sacrifice for guilty men.

34. *And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?*

That was a very important question; it went to the very root of the matter. It was useless for him to read about some unknown person; he must know who it was of whom the prophet had written.

35. *Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the came scripture,*

and preached unto him Jesus.

It seems that, wherever Philip went, he had but one subject. When he went down to the city of Samaria, he preached Christ to them; and now that he talks to this Ethiopian eunuch, he preaches unto him Jesus.

You may begin anywhere in the Bible, and preach Jesus. You may begin at the first chapter of Genesis, or at the last chapter of Malachi, at the first of Matthew or the last of Revelation, and still preach Jesus, for he is the sum and substance of the whole Scripture.

36, 37. *And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*

That is the great confession of faith that is to be made by all who have believed in Jesus.

38, 39. *And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.*

The Holy Spirit will not permit us to depend too much upon men an our teachers. The Spirit of the Lord did not take away the Bible: that was left to the eunuch. He only caught away Philip after the evangelist had furnished the enquirer with the key with which he could open the Scriptures, then he could unlock the Word himself. That he did so, if history is to be believed, is very clear. He went home to Ethiopia, perhaps to Abyssinia, and the people there heard the gospel from him, and to this day there are some traces of our holy faith in that land.

40. *But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.*

We know quite well what “he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea,” although it is not mentioned here. Wherever he went, he had but one theme: “the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ.” So may it be with us wherever we go.

Acts 9

1, 2. *And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*

His very breath was hot with malice against the saints, he could not live without venting his spite upon the disciples of Christ. He showed this by the fact that he not only sought to arrest men, but he was equally cruel towards women, who, from their weakness, one would have thought might have been let alone but he expressly desired it to be written in the letters that, "whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem."

3. *And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus:*

The lion is about to leap upon his prey. The sheep-fold lies in the valley and the wolf surveys it from the hill-side. "Alas for the Church of God at Damascus!" you and I would have said if we had been there.

and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven:

A supernatural blaze, as though heaven's gate had been thrown open, and the glory had come streaming down upon this rebellious man.

4. *And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*

It was a voice divine, majestic, piercing, affectionate, convincing. Saul's mind was of a deeply-logical kind, so Christ's question was an appeal to his reasoning faculties: "Give the reason for thy present action. 'Why persecutest thou me?'"

5. *And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

There is something very characteristic about Christ's answer to Saul's question. He did not say, "It is hard for me;" although he was himself persecuted in his members, and felt intense sympathy with them, he did not dwell upon that; but he said to Saul, "It is hard for thee." There was much pity in the rebuke. Saul was like a bullock that has been pricked by the sharp ox-goad, and that kicks against it, and so is hurt all the more. Our Lord knew what sorrow it would cause Saul in the years to come, for he would never cease to lament that he had persecuted the disciples of Christ.

6. *And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?*

This was a very natural question from one who had always tried to live by doing. He had been a work-monger up to that very moment, so he naturally cried, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

"Thou must become a disciple, and sit at the feet of another man, of a humbler sort, and thou must learn from him." Christ will never teach us by visions what we can learn by the ordinary means of instruction, nor will he work miracles where common methods may suffice.

7. *And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless,*

They were struck with astonishment—

hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

A loud voice stunned their ears, but they could not understand its message.

8. *And Saul arose from the earth, and when his eyes were opened, he saw no men: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.*

So the proud persecutor, who was going to Damascus as a conqueror to crush the saints of God, was himself led into the city as a captive, to be for ever afterwards the slave of Jesus Christ.

9. *And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.*

What passed through that mind, which was darkened to natural light, but was being filled with spiritual light, we can well guess; I mean, those of us who have experienced true conviction of sin. In those three days, he lived over again his life of opposition to the Lord Jesus; what heart-break he must have felt, and what anguish of soul, and what holy resolves he must have made during his three days' blindness and fasting!

10. *And there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias;*

One of those to whom Paul had intended to pay his cruel respects.

And to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold I am here, Lord.

A grand way to be able to answer the Lord at all times. May we never be, dear friends, where we shall be ashamed to say, "Behold, I am here, Lord." Some Christians go into very strange company, and they would not like their Master to know. They would be ashamed to say, "Behold, I am here, Lord."

11. *And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is*

called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus:

The Lord knows the whereabouts of his people. He knows your whereabouts tonight, young man. I only trust that though you are an opponent of the gospel, he has brought you here on purpose that you may become one of his beast advocates, through his renewing grace.

for, behold, he prayeth.

He had been a praying man for most of his life, for he was a devout Jew and according to his light he had lived up to his knowledge. But now he was praying in the Christian sense of the term, drawing near to God through the very Christ whom he had in his ignorance and unbelief persecuted. How many prayers of unregenerate men, who know not Christ, and are not constrained by his love, go for nothing! When they first from the heart confess their sin, and cry to God for mercy, then they begin really to pray.

12. *And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.*

You see how true revelations fit into each other. Something is revealed to Ananias, and it is also revealed to Saul, and therefore it is proved to be true. Some years ago, a brother told me that he had had it revealed to him that I was to let him preach for me in the Tabernacle. I said that of course I would agree to that when it was revealed to me that I was to let him, but I did not believe in lopsided revelations. You will find a great many of those crazy revelations about, and you may generally judge them in some such common-sense way as that.

13–16. *Then Ananias answered Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must*

suffer for my name's sake.

And it seemed a gracious retribution of him, did it not? I say not a penal infliction. I know not how to put it better than "a gracious retribution"—that he who made saints to suffer should now have the high privilege to take the front rank in suffering himself. Often, I doubt not, when he was bearing and enduring with such matchless fortitude, he thought of those saints whom he had harried and worried in the days of his carnal estate; and how he must have prized them, and with what wonder must he have said, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all the saints, is this grace given, Chat I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

17. *And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul,*

Oh! what new words, "brother Saul"! A few days before no man durst have used such Language of familiarity to this mighty disciple of Gamaliel, armed with authority from the chief priests. Now how sweetly it must have sounded on his ear, "brother Saul"! Oh! there is nothing that makes us such brothers as the gospel.

"This is the dear uniting bond That will not let us part."

17, 18. *The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith,*

The film upon Saul's eyes was comparable to the scales of a fish, or else that it fell off as scales might fall. When the blinding film was gone, light broke into the darkness of Saul. In different men, sin manifests its chief power in different parts of their nature. In the case of many, sin is most apparent in their eyes; that is to say, ignorance, error, and prejudice have injured their mental sight. Some have the withered hand of conscious inability, others have the deaf ear of mental obtuseness; but there are far more who hear the joyful sound, and display much energy, but they hear without understanding, and are zealous without knowledge,

for they are blind.

This was Saul's condition. He was thoroughly honest: we might say of his heart, when; it was at its worst, that it was always true to its convictions. He was no deceiver, and no timeserver. He went in for what he believed to be right with all his might; lukewarmness and selfish policy were alien to his nature. He dashed with all his might against the doctrine of the cross because he thought it to be an imposition. His fault lay in his eyes, and so, when the eyes were set right, Saul was right. When he perceived that Jesus was, after all, the Messiah, the man became just as earnest a follower of Christ as before he had been a persecutor.

and arose, and was baptized.

What else should a believer be but be baptized? It is the very next step which he should take after he has found the Savior.

19. *And when he had received meat, he was strengthened.*

It seemed unimportant to put that in here, did it not? Yet it is not so. While grace heals the infirmities of the mind, bodily food is still wanted for the body; and sometimes it is well with your young convert, when he has been a long time in distress of mind, that you refresh him in body, as well as cheer him in heart.

Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

Thus did the lion lie down with the lamb, and the wolf with the kid.

20. *And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.*

And had they ever heard such a preacher before? How they gnashed their teeth on him—the unbelievers; and how the timid saints crept in and heard this man advocate—this man who had had a wonderful twist in his mind from which he never recovered—who had seen something—as yet he himself could hardly tell

all that he had seen. Oh! it must have been fine hearing to listen to his preaching that Christ is the Son of God.

21, 22. *But all that heard him were amazed*

I should like to have heard one of those first sermons of the apostle, and to have seen the astonishment of the people as they listened to the converted persecutor: "All that heard him were amazed,"—

and said: Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

And this is the great thing to prove to the Jew. Oh! when shall it come to pass that poor forsaken Israel shall know that this is the very Christ? God grant her restoration right speedily!

23–25. *And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.*

I never heard of a more precious basketful of material than that. Sometimes, the greatest of men may owe their safety to the very poorest of instruments; and I think it is the duty of a Christian to avoid trouble if he can, just as our Lord bade his disciples, when they were persecuted in one city, to flee to another. Paul was carrying out that command of his Master. It was not cowardice, it was the very soul of courage, that he might go elsewhere to proclaim the gospel that he had received in Damascus.

26. *And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that*

he was a disciple.

They did not admit anybody and everybody into the Church. They guarded it as Christ's Church should be guarded, that unworthy people might not enter it. If any of you should be kept back a little while, you can say to yourself, "Well, they kept back Paul." We are poor fallible creatures, but we try to judge rightly concerning those who wish to unite with us.

27–31. *But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem, and he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.*

Those little seasons of hush and calm, between the great persecutions, have always been prolific of converts. I hope, in the midst, of successive controversies which darken the sky overhead, that, when the rain is over, and the noise and trouble it costs some tender spirits have ceased, and the powers of darkness have been hustled to sleep once more, we may have some clear shining after rain, and brotherly fellowship once again be renewed.

32, 33. *And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.*

It is very clear that the many was truly sick. Had he not been really sick, the incident before us would have been all a piece of imposture—a feint and a presence from beginning to end: but he was hopelessly infirm. He had been anxiously watched by his friends for eight years, and was so completely palsied

that during all those years he had not left his bed, which had grown hard as a stone beneath him. Now, as there is no room for a great cure unless there is a great sickness, so there is no room for God's great grace unless there is great sin. Jesus Christ did not come into the world to save sham sinners, but real sinners; neither did he descend from heaven to seek those who are not diseased with sin, for the whole have no need of a physician, but he has come to seek those who are deeply diseased, and to give them real healing.

34, 35. *And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.*

The story of the incarnate God had come to his ears by some means or other, and Aeneas understood that though Jesus Christ was not in the room, and there was only Peter and a few friends there, and though Jesus Christ was not on earth, but was gone to heaven, yet his power on earth was the same as ever it was. He knew that Jesus could work miracles from heaven as well as when he was here below. He understood that he who healed the palsy when he was here, could heal the palsy now that he has risen to his throne; and so Aeneas believed in Jesus Christ from what he had heard, simply trusting in him for healing. By means of that faith Aeneas was made whole.

36-39. *Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.*

O all you Christian people, who love your Lord, be busy in those sacred works

which can only be performed on earth; for angels cannot clothe the naked or feed the hungry. No angel can be a Dorcas to make garments for the poor. These things are for this life; these modes of praising God are only for time, there are others for eternity; but these are for this life, and to these we have to attend as long as we are here.

40-43. *But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.*

The resurrections that have already taken place give us hope and confidence that there shall be a resurrection of all saints. These are pledges of the resurrection; a few specimens, a few chance gems flung into the world to tell us how full God's hand is of resurrection jewels.

Acts 10

1-4. *There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

We must not, of course, think that these things give any claim to salvation; but rather that they are the expression of hearts prepared to receive the message of salvation, seeking the Lord, “if haply they might feel after him, and find him.”

The best natural religion needs to be illuminated by revelation and instructed by the doctrine of the cross; for there is Cornelius, a man worshipping the true God devoutly, and living correctly, and yet what must be done for him? Is he to be saved without Christ? Is he to find his own way to life by the development of his good qualities? No, but he must be told to fetch Peter, to tell him about Jesus the Savior, and if no other means will answer an angel must descend to guide him to the appointed teacher. When he had gone as far as he could go, it became essential that he should hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, it is clear as noonday that if for this best of cases the gospel was absolutely needful, it must assuredly be required by the myriads who are not so excellent.

5-13. *And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of*

his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; and when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: and he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.

Peter was to know that those ceremonial laws, which forbade the eating of this and that, were now to be abrogated. By Christ's coming here on earth, and bearing a mortal body about with him, he has taken away the ban from all forbidden meats, so far as they were forbidden upon religious grounds. God has cleansed them, and what God has cleansed Peter was not to call common. In Christ, nationalities are blended. Think of the division between the Jew and the Gentile; what can make them one, but Christ? He breaks down the middle wall of partition, and unites them.

14. *But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.*

This is a very curious expression. I do not mind how you turn it into English from the original, but it is a very strange compound. If Peter had said, "Not so," there would have been a clear consistency in his language and tone. But "Not so, Lord," is an odd jumble of self-will and reverence, of pride and humility, of contradiction and devotion. Surely, when you say, "Not so," it ought not to be said to the Lord; and if you say, "Lord," you ought not to put side by side with such an ascription the expression, "Not so." Peter always was a blunderer in his early days, and he had not grown out of his old habits of honest impetuosity. He meant well, and his expression was not intended to convey all that we might easily make of it.

15. *And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*

Prohibition upon mere ceremonial points, and commands upon carnal matters are now abolished, and great is our liberty: we shall be foolish indeed if we suffer ourselves to be again entangled with the yoke of bondage. Our minority was ended when the Lord, who had aforetime spoken to us by his prophets, at last sent his Son to lead us up to the highest form of spiritual manhood.

16-27. *This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.*

Never was the ground better ploughed, nor in a finer condition for receiving the living seed.

28-33. *And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.*

That was a beautiful sight in the house of Cornelius the centurion, when he had fetched in all his kinsmen and near friends before Peter arrived, so that he could say to the apostle, “Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.” They were all there; all ready; all waiting; all prepared to hear, and all glad to hear. The more of such congregations there are, the more will the Spirit of God work, the more numerous will be the converts, and the more will Christ’s kingdom spread among men.

34-36. *Then Peter opened his mouth,*

No sooner did Peter know that he was commissioned to the Gentile centurion and his household, than he came to his house; and when he found himself surrounded by the family and their friends, he girt up his loins for his work, and gave his whole soul to his subject. Peter goes straight to his business; there is no beating about the bush, no prefatory apology, but he begins to preach.

and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but

in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

He is Lord not of the Jew only, but also of the Gentile; not of one race and nation, but of all the tribes of Adam born. He is Lord of all. Remember that text, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he may give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him." The great object of Christ's mediatorial kingdom is the salvation of the elect; but in order to compass that grand result, power is given to Christ over all flesh, that is over all mankind; and this last truth is the reason why we are enabled honestly to preach the gospel to every creature under heaven. Because Christ has power over all flesh we preach the gospel to all flesh. Because he is Lord of all we are permitted to preach the gospel to all, and ay to all who come within its hearing, "Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely."

37, 38. *That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power:*

There was the spring of his life's power, his anointing from the Holy Ghost, who bare witness of him in Jordan and at other times. He saith, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for the Lord hath anointed me."

who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

That one stroke gives a full portrait of Christ. You have summed up in that sentence the biography of Jesus as he lived among men: he was an itinerant missionary, a travelling preacher, a general benefactor, and "he went about doing good."

39. *And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:*

He does not take away the offense of the cross, nor put it in smooth language, as some would have done; but he confesses that they hanged him on a tree. Hanging or crucifixion was an accursed and shameful death in the judgment of all mankind, and Peter confesses that his Lord thus died: there is no concealing, or even veiling of the matter; he acknowledges that he died by hanging upon a tree. I rejoice in this bold telling out of the doctrine of the cross in what some may call its baldness, but in what we will regard as its sublime simplicity. In Christ's death the shame is honor, and the disgrace renown: to deck the cross with flowers and make crucifixion honorable is to rob the august transaction of its leading element, namely, the endurance of shame because of man's shameful sin.

40, 41. *Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.*

It was no fiction; he was openly shown on many occasions to those best able to recognize him. The risen Christ was seen, and seen clearly, yea, and spoken with, and touched with finger and hand by his disciples. He was not shown to all the people, for he was not to be exhibited to gratify curiosity, but to secure faith. The evidence of five hundred persons is quite sufficient to the establishment of an historical fact, and perhaps better for the purpose than the witness of unnumbered crowds.

There is something far more convincing in the testimony of men who themselves were persecuted and put to death for bearing such witness, and died adhering unanimously to the truth of their common testimony. God gave to the whole world sufficient evidence to establish the resurrection of Christ, for many did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

42. *And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.*

The apostle was not long in his address before he came to the doctrine of the judgment of all men by Jesus Christ. He says that he was commanded to preach it, and therefore he did preach it. It may not be called "the gospel," but it is

certainly a most important accessory truth to the gospel: it is one of those doctrines without which a gospel ministry would not be complete. I mean that if in any testimony concerning Christ the doctrine that he shall come a second time to judge the world were utterly neglected such a testimony would not be a complete gospel.

43. *To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.*

The powers of life and death are entrusted to Jehovah Jesus, the Son of God. He has authority to pass by transgression, iniquity, and sin in his own name, as in the name of the Eternal God. His atonement has made it possible for him to do this in perfect consistency with his character as Judge: he pardons, and when he pardons it is as just an act as when he condemns.

This was what he was driving at; and when he had reached this point enough truth had been taught to save a soul, and God, the Holy Spirit, at once used it.

44. *While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.*

Peter preached at the first Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost fell upon the company of Jewish believers; and it is remarkable that he should be the preacher at the second Pentecost, when the Holy Ghost descended upon those of the uncircumcision while they were listening to the gospel. Philip was at Caesarea, and might have been called in, but God had determined that the strict Peter, the minister of the circumcision, should himself open the door of faith to the Gentiles. Paul was at that time converted, and it might have seemed to be more appropriate to have used him in enlightening this Italian officer, but the Lord thought not so: he would send the Spirit upon the Gentiles in connection with the same person who preached when this visitation blessed the converts of Israel. Peter preached as it were upon the ruins of the middle wall of partition which once divided the sons of men.

45-47. *And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was*

poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?

He therefore commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord, and thus affirmed his belief that faith had purified them. He saw that the Lord had given the choicest of gospel blessings to uncircumcised believers, even the power of the Holy Ghost, and therefore he felt that they were to be received into the church without circumcision.

48. *And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.*

This sermon was never finished: it remains for ever a homiletical fragment, a broken column of the temple of wisdom, a discourse of which we shall never know the conclusion intended by its author. I am sure that Peter felt full of matter that day, for so a minister usually feels when he knows that he is sent by the Lord himself with a special commission, and sees a people with open heart receiving all that he utters. He then feels like a vessel wanting vent, his heart is inditing a good matter, his tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Yet the sermon was never finished, but closed abruptly. Oh that our sermons were incomplete for the same cause that Peter's was; for the Holy Spirit, who speaketh better by himself than by the most earnest voice, caused a divinely joyful interruption —"The Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word." The sermon was stopped while they heard the converts speak with tongues, and magnify God, and the preacher did not return to his sermon, but together with his converts attended to baptism and then enjoyed holy fellowship, Oh that the Spirit of God would in the same manner interrupt us! We have too much talk, and too little of those blessed silences which he is sure to cause

Acts 11

1-3. *And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.*

One of the greatest obstacles which the Christian religion ever overcame, was the inveterate prejudice which possessed the minds of its earliest followers. The Jewish believers, the twelve apostles, and those whom Jesus Christ had called from the dispersed of Israel, were so attached to the idea that salvation was of the Jews, and that none but the disciples of Abraham, or, at any rate, the circumcised ones, could be saved, that they could not bring themselves to the thought that Jesus had come to be the Savior of all nations, and that in him should all the people of the earth be blessed. It was with difficulty they could allow the supposition; it was so opposite to all their Jewish education, that we find them summoning Peter before a council of Christians, and saving to him, “thou wentest in to men uncircumcised and didst eat with them.”

4-18. *But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.*

But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: and he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.

Peter could not exonerate himself until he had rehearsed the matter fully, and said that God had appeared unto him in a vision, declaring, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common," and that the Lord had bidden him preach the gospel to Cornelius and his household, inasmuch as they were believers. After this the power of grace was so mighty that these Jews could no longer withstand it: and in the teeth of all their previous education, they at once assumed the broad principle of Christianity," and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Let us bless God that now we are free from the trammels of Judaism, and that we are not under those of a Gentilism which has in its turn excluded the Jew, but that we live so near the blessed time that is coming, when Jew and Gentile, bond and free, shall feel themselves one in Jesus Christ our Head.

19, 20. *Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and*

Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.

The brethren who had dwelt together in church fellowship at Jerusalem were scattered abroad by persecution which arose about Stephen. Their Master had told them that when they were persecuted in one city they were to flee to another. They obeyed his command, and in the course of escape from persecution they took very long journeys—very long journeys indeed for that age of the world, when locomotion was exceedingly difficult; but wherever they found themselves they began at once to preach Jesus Christ, so that the scattering of the disciples was also a scattering of good seed in broader fields. The malice of Satan was made the instrument of the mercy of God.

These good people of the early church, however, with all their zeal, were somewhat narrow-minded and hampered by their national prejudices, for they preached at first to the Jews only, and it was very hard to make them see that the gospel was meant for the whole race of man, Gentiles as well as Jews. Their Master had said "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," and yet they began with preaching to the Jews only.

21. *And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*

None ever believe in Jesus except those in whom God's arm has been revealed, for Jesus says, "No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." What more do we want? Sow, brother, for God has ploughed. Go up and build, for God has prepared the stones and made ready the foundation.

22-26. *Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.*

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

The Gentiles, though they were for awhile passed over by the brethren, turned out to be the most hopeful of all classes; from the Gentile fields they reaped harvests such as were never gathered in Judea. Antioch with its Grecians became famous among Christian churches—there the church of Christ first took its name amid a revival of religion; when great multitudes believed and turned unto the Lord. God had from of old intended that the great majority of the election of grace should be gathered out of those very Gentiles whom even the apostles themselves scarcely ventured to address.

27-30. *And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.*

Those who had received spiritual things from the poor Jews at Jerusalem were bound by every tie of holy brotherhood to remember their benefactors in the time of famine.

Acts 12

1-4. *Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.*

When Herod had been able to apprehend Peter, he was not content with ordinary means of keeping him in custody. He has Peter put into the strongest prison in Jerusalem; to make assurance doubly sure, he is chained not to one soldier, but to two. He was too great a prize to be readily lost. He anticipated so much satisfaction to himself, from the applause of the people, for putting so eminent a servant of Christ as James to death, that he could not afford to lose an opportunity of getting further prey; so he seizes upon him who was accounted a pillar in the Church with singular avidity.

5. *Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.*

Peter was in prison, and Herod promised himself the great pleasure of putting him to death. But prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him. The walls of the prison were very thick, but prayer was made without ceasing. The soldiers were very watchful; there were sixteen of them, appointed to watch him by turns—four at a time, and he was chained by both hands to two of them. Yet prayer was made without ceasing of the Church for him, and prayer laughs altogether at stone walls, and handcuffs and iron bars, and gates of brass.

With their humble prayers and tears they were pleading for their brother, whose valuable life they could ill afford to spare, for the infant Church needed the apostles at least for a season. I think I hear them pleading one after the other —"Lord, remember Peter! Thou knowest how we love him; our desires go up for him. James is dead. Alas! we took up his body and mourned him! Let not Peter be slain! Oh, take not thou the prop from under us! Remove not the pillar from the wall, nor the stone from its place." The Lord has heard their cries. Peter's cause is in his hand. He will interfere in due time.

6. *And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.*

Peter has been lying in prison the whole week. The feast of unleavened bread is over, it is the last night, the last night! The evening has crept on; nay, the dark hours have set in; it is midnight. The sun will soon be rising—in a few more hours—and then where is Peter? Lord, if thou do not interfere, where is Peter? If thou come not now to help him his blood shall make the populace of Jerusalem glad while they gloat and delight in his slaughter!

Peter is asleep, doing nothing, doing nothing! Well, and the best thing for him too, for the case was put into God's hand. Suppose Peter had been awake, what could he do? Had he been fretting and troubling himself, what good could he have done? Finding, therefore, that nothing remained for him, he just throws himself upon the mercy of God, shuts his eyes as peaceably as though he were to wake tomorrow to a wedding feast, and not to his own execution.

7. *And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.*

Just at that last and darkest hour of the night, God's opportunity overtook man's extremity. A light shone in the dungeon. Peter was awakened. God never is before his time; nor is he ever too late; he comes just when he is needed.

8, 9. *And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy*

sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

When Peter came out of prison, his deliverance was so marvellous, that he did not know whether it was true or whether it was a vision. Thus it is commonly with us. We see, as a main fact, the downward course by which we corrupted our ways when we were dead in sin. But the hour we first believed, that blessed season when we were translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, seems like a vision to us.

10-12. *When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying.*

I fancy that he considered it all round, and thought "Where shall I go?" and he recollected that it was prayer-meeting night down at John Mark's mother's house, and there would he go, because he felt that there he should meet with true brethren. In those days they did things by plan and order, according to that text, "Let all things be done decently and in order," and I have no doubt that it had been duly arranged that the meeting should be held that evening at the house of John Mark's mother, and therefore Peter went there, and found, as he probably expected, that there was a prayer-meeting going on.

It is clear that these friends fully believed that there was power in prayer; for, Peter being in prison, they did not meet together to arrange a plan for getting him out. Some wise brother might have suggested the bribing of the guards, and another might have suggested something else; but they had done with planning, and betook themselves to praying. I do not find that they met to petition Herod.

It would have been of no avail to ask that monster to relent: they might as well request a wolf to release a lamb which he has seized. No, the petitions were to Herod's Lord and Master, to the great invisible God. It looked as if they could do nothing, but they felt they could do everything by prayer. They thought little of the fact that sixteen soldiers had him in charge. What are sixteen guards? If there had been sixteen thousand soldiers these believing men and women would still have prayed Peter out. They believed in God, that he would do wonders; they believed in prayer, that it had an influence with God, and that the Lord did listen to the believing petitions of his servants. They met together for prayer in no dubious mood. They knew what they were at, and had no question as to the power which lay in supplication.

13-16. *And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished.*

The answer came so speedily that they were themselves surprised. It has sometimes been said that they did not expect Peter to be set free, and that their astonishment was the result of unbelief; perhaps so; but I doubt it, for you must remember that their prayer did set Peter free, and therefore it does not look as if it could have been unbelieving prayer. I trace their surprise to another cause. I think they expected that God would somehow or other deliver Peter, but they did not think he would deliver him in the dead of the night. They very likely had appointed in their own minds that something would happen next day, and so their surprise arose, not from the fact that Peter was free so much as from his being out of the dungeon at that particular time, and in that particular manner, for I cannot judge that to have been an unbelieving prayer which really did win the day with the God of heaven.

17. *But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren.*

And he departed, and went into another place.

The apostle was but a poor, trembling believer; he would not have Mary or the damsel Rhoda talk too loudly, or express their gladness too cheerfully: he beckoned them with his hand to hold their peace. He just declared how the Lord had brought him out, and then he departed and went into another place.

I would have you make your boast in the Lord, and speak of what he has done for your souls; but I would warn you not to vaunt your experience, or attempt to magnify yourselves as if we, any of us, had herein matter for glory. The very manner of God's delivering grace is to hide pride from our eyes; and the reality is none the less palpable, because the angel did all for us to show his strength, and then withdrew from us that we should feel our own weakness.

18. *Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.*

We can very well understand that there would be great excitement. It was the most improbable thing in the world that Peter should escape from custody. In the innermost dungeon, securely chained, watched by a fourfold guard, with no powerful friends outside to attempt a rescue, it was marvellous that, in the morning, the bird was flown; the prison doors were closed and the guards in their places, but Peter, where was he?

19. *And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.*

Herod grew very wroth. He was delighted to have killed James, and he meant to have killed Peter, and therefore he cried, in great chagrin, "What has become of Peter?" What a sight it would be to see the devil when he has lost some chosen sinner, when he hears the man who once could swear beginning to pray, when he, beholds the heart that once was hard as adamant beginning to melt! I think I hear him say to himself, "What has become of Peter? Another of my servants has deserted me! Another of my choice followers has yielded to my foe! What, has Christ taken another lamb from between the jaws of the lion? Will he leave

me none? Shall I have no soldiers? Shall none of my black guard be left to me? Am I to be entirely deserted? What has become of Peter?" Oh, it is a glorious thing to cause a howling through the infernal regions, and to set devils biting their tongues because poor sinners have snapped their chains! Pray that, as the prayers of the church then set Peter free, and made Herod angry, so the prayers of the church now may set sinners free, and put the devil to shame.

20-23. *And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*

That same God, who had delivered Peter, knew how to lay hold of Herod, for we are told that immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. The first is a brilliant deed of an infinitely wise grace, the next is an astounding deed of an infinitely—wise justice. It does not need that you go to the gallows to meet your doom; a few worms can destroy you. It does not need that you be killed in a great railway accident, or that there be a collision at sea, or that you fall on the field of battle.

24, 25. *But the word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.*

Those terrible and bloody persecutions under the Roman Emperor by no means stayed the progress of the gospel; but strangely enough seemed to press forward for the crown of martyrdom. The church probably never increased at a greater ratio than as when her foes were most fierce to assail and most resolute to destroy her. It was so in after times. The Reformation in this country and throughout Europe never went on so prosperously as when it was most

vigorously opposed. You shall find in any individual church that wherever evil men have conspired together, and a storm of opposition has burst forth against the saints, the heart of the Lord has been moved with compassion, and the hand of the Lord has been raised to succor, till we have come to look upon opposition as an omen of good, and persecution for righteousness' sake as a tearful seed-time, quickly to be followed by a harvest of joy.

Acts 13

1, 2. *Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*

We sit down, and we begin to figure away the expense of such—and-such a form of Christian service, and we think that would be a good plan, and the other, and a third, and a fourth, and a fifth—all pieces of human machinery. But I think if we were oftener on our knees about God's work, we should oftener do right, and the right methods and the right men, and the right plans would come to us. Christ is the head of the Church—and who thinks so much about the Church as the head of the Church? And while we wait upon him I do not doubt but what fresh plans and fresh schemes will be marked out, and that different kinds of men will be called to the work as distinctly as if angels had touched their lips with a live coal from off the burning altar, and who may be "separated" to teach the Word where, perhaps, it has never reached before.

4. *So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.*

Cyprus was by no means a reputable island: it was devoted to the goddess Venus, and you can imagine what her worship was, and what would be the fruitful licentiousness which sprang of it. It was the native country of Barnabas, and, as he was at first the leader of the missionary party sent out by the church of Antioch, it was fit that Barnabas and Saul should begin preaching there.

The more wicked the locality the more need for Christian effort in that very spot. Moreover, the Holy Ghost had sent the missionaries to Cyprus, and therefore they might safely enter the caverns of dark obscenity, and proclaim the word of salvation among the openly abandoned.

5. *And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.*

It seemed hard to teach this man, this Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin, as touching the law a Pharisee, that he was sent to preach to the Gentiles, for even when he went to Cyprus he and Barnabas kept pretty much to Israel, preaching the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: but now he is to have an object lesson, which will show him his full career as in a living parable.

6, 7. *And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.*

The chief magistrate of the island was a candid, studious, prudent man; he possessed an intelligent and inquisitive spirit, and was desirous to know all that could be known.

A certain Jew who was expert in the dark learning of the East, and practiced sorcery, had obtained considerable influence over this ruler, whose name was Sergius Paul; but instead of teaching him the truth this false-hearted Jew imparted to him the mysteries of the Magi, and the superstitions of sorcery. Bar-jesus was this mountebank’s Jewish name, but he was false to it, for he was no son of Jesus, but one of a generation of vipers.

Sergius Paul hearing that there were other Eastern teachers in the island, and being dissatisfied with the teaching of Elymas, sent for Barnabas and Saul to teach him the word of God. What a door of hope for this prudent man! What a splendid opening for the two preachers of Christ! Barnabas and Saul can go to

court and hold a meeting in the proconsul's palace, with one of the best of hearers as the center of their congregation; for a really prudent man is one of the most hopeful of listeners to the gospel if his prudence has not curdled into sophistry, and his knowledge has not fermented into self-conceit. It was a hopeful omen for the rest of the island that its proconsul was so free from prejudice that he called the two missionaries to his hall, and desired to hear from them the word of God.

8. *But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.*

As Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses when he commenced his mission, so this Jew Bar-jesus opposed himself to the ministers of Christ. In some respects opposition to the gospel is to be much deplored. Under some aspects the withstanding of the message of mercy is a very grievous thing. Should the glad tidings be denied? Should the doctrine which God has given by express revelation be held up to scorn? Woe unto the men who dare thus to provoke their God! Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish! No man can set himself against God and against his Christ without frightful peril to his own soul.

Saul of Tarsus himself, who was opposed by Elymas, had been a furious enemy of that gospel which now he earnestly proclaimed; and this fact must have sustained his courage under the sorcerer's attack. Saul did it ignorantly in unbelief, but there is reason to fear that this Elymas wilfully perverted the right ways of the Lord, and set himself deliberately with malice prepense to keep back an enquiring soul from the true faith. In such a case opposition to the faith is to be sadly deplored because of our pity for the enemy of truth, who is in this thing an enemy to his own soul.

Here are Barnabas and Saul, two poor Jews, and they are met by one of their own countrymen who has obtained the ear of a ruler, by acting the part of a courtier and a doctor. He knew how to play his cards with the proconsul. How can these two men hope to destroy his influence, and establish the cross of Christ in its stead. If you had looked at them you would have said Elymas was master of the situation. He had a fullness of subtlety and no conscience to embarass his movements; he could use any cunning trick, while the missionaries could only keep to truth. He seemed sure of defeating the two simple-minded men; but as soon as Saul drew forth the sword of the Spirit, and told him plainly that though

he might be called the son of Jesus he was the son of the devil, the victory was speedy and the vanquished sorcerer begged for help to make a retreat.

9-11. *Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.*

When Saul looked at him and pronounced upon him the solemn judgment of God, namely that he should be blind and should not see the sun for a season, then the proconsul saw what power attended the word of the Lord, and how truly it came forth from the Almighty. God by that solemn judgment set his seal to the truth and let all men know that it could not be reviled without the most solemn hazard to the opposer. Blinded Elymas seeking some to lead him by the hand was a visible witness for the truth gainst which he had fought. His sightless eyeballs were a just judgment from God. He had shut the eyes of his mind to the truth, and the Lord justly closed the eyes of his body; as he groped for the wall he was against his will a most convincing witness to the truth of the gospel, and of the divine commission of Barnabas and Saul.

12. *Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.*

It is doctrine, then, or faithful teaching, which brings men to Christ. Let those who despise doctrine mind what they are doing, for the doctrine of the cross is only foolishness to them who perish. Under the influence of the Holy Ghost the plain teaching of the word of the Lord leads men to believe in Jesus.

The proconsul was no doubt astonished to see Elymas blinded, but he was a great deal more astonished at the doctrine which Paul preached when he began to tell him that salvation was not by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ; that the way to be accepted of God was not by presenting to the Lord anything performed by us or felt within us, but by laying hold upon the

righteousness which Jesus Christ has wrought out and brought in. When he heard this good news, he might well be astonished, and yield his heart to Jesus.

13. *Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.*

"John"—that is, John Mark, as we see by Acts 15:37.

14. *But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down.*

They would be noticed as strangers who had come thither. The synagogue did not generally contain a very large assembly, and the Jews of the place would be well known to one another, and they would notice that two or three men had come in whom they had not been accustomed to see in their company.

15. *And after reading of the law and the prophets,*

From which there were always two appointed lessons, one from the writings of Moses, and another from one of the prophets; and on this day it was probably the first chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, or the first chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah—

the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

They were seen to be Jews who were traveling, and they were invited by the minister who conducted the service to stand up and say anything they had to say. "Then Paul stood up, and, beckoning, with his hand, said"—

16. *Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.*

Or, rather, “and ye Gentile proselytes, give audience.”

17. *The God of this people of Israel choose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he there out of it.*

They always liked to hear the story of their race, it was sure to win their attention. Notice how expressly Paul puts it that, though they were a favored people, it was by the election of divine grace that they were such: “The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers.” The Lord chooseth whom he will, and he chose the fathers of the house of Israel: “and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt.” God took care of them when they were aliens and foreigners under a cruel power in the land of Egypt: “and with an high arm brought he them out of it.” This was the glory of Israel; the Jews always delighted to hear of Egypt, and of the Exodus, and of the great things that God did for them in the day of their redemption when, by the sprinkling of the blood of the paschal lamb, they were protected from the sword of the destroying angel.

18. *And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.*

It is a continuous history that Paul gives to these people at Antioch, and it brings to their minds the sins of their fathers as well as the grace of their God. These are two things that you and I need always to keep in mind, God’s grace and our own sin. Truly, I fear that God has had much provocation from us during our forty years, even as he had with his ancient people. There is much meaning packed away in that sentence, “Forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.”

You that are familiar with your Bibles will be struck with the great likeness of this sermon by Paul to that of Stephen. It seems to run on the same lines. Stephen gave the history of Israel to the Israelites. Paul does the same. Ah! we can never tell how great was the influence of that dying Stephen upon this living Paul. Paul is the continuation of Stephen. His blood was not lost in that day when they stoned him to death. From his ashes sprang this mighty preacher of the Word.

19. *And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot.*

The Lord did not run back from his covenant. He promised them a land flowing with milk and honey, and he gave it to them, even though seven nations had to be destroyed to make room for them. This verse reminds us of that passage in Isaiah: “since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.” He gave seven nations of Canaan for this one nation of Israel.

20, 21. *And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. And afterward they desired a king:*

This was another piece of wantonness on the Israelites’ part. God was their King, yet they must have a visible king, like the other nations by which they were surrounded. They were faithfully warned by the prophet Samuel of the evil consequences that would follow their choice, but they would not be content with their God as their only Ruler: “afterward they desired a king.”

and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

Do you not sometimes hear people speak disparagingly about certain parts of scripture, and say, “Oh, that is the historical part”? Never fall into the error of thinking less of one part of Scripture than of another, but remember that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the men of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” This sermon, by Paul, is a rehearsal of Old Testament history; and he would not have spoken unprofitably; you may depend upon that. I would urge you to bear a protest against the method, which seems to be springing up nowadays, of saying, “That part of the Bible is for the Jews; “or “That particular Epistle”—for they speak thus even of the New Testament—“is not for us.” It is all for us, and we are to seek to profit by every word of it, praying the Holy Spirit to apply it to our hearts.

22. *And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will.*

All this would be very pleasing to the Jews. They were never weary of hearing the ancient history of themselves as a chosen people. Paul ingratiates himself with them. The gospel that he had to preach was bitter to them, but he gilds the pill, and we must do what we can lawfully and properly to win the attention of men and their kindly feeling to us, although we must faithfully preach the gospel. Now he got as far as David into history. Now we will step to Christ.

23. *Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus:*

No matter where the apostle begins, he comes to Jesus Christ before long. No matter what the preacher's text may be, he must never close a sermon without having set forth the claims of Jesus. This should be the invariable rule of our ministry, that Christ is the top and bottom, the sum and substance of all our preaching. Paul could truly say, "We preach Christ crucified."

24, 25. *When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. And as John fulfilled his course, he said Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one alter me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.*

He brings in the testimony of John, who was universally respected among them. They regarded him as the last of the prophets, and so grill Paul tries to win their kind feelings.

26. *Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.*

This is plain preaching, pointed preaching, bold preaching. Paul did not conceal the truth, though he well knew how objectionable it would be to his hearers, yet he put it before them in the plainest possible terms: “To you is the word of this salvation sent.”

27. *For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.*

It was strange that they should fulfill the prophecies which they had often read, no doubt, with fear and trembling. They became the guilty agents by which the prophecies were fulfilled. Paul’s preaching agrees with what Peter said on the day of Pentecost: “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”

See how easy it is for people to hear the Bible read, and yet to know very little about what it contains. They may have the lessons read every Sabbath day in their hearing, and yet they may not understand anything that is in them. They may even become themselves great readers of the Scriptures, yet not come to Christ, as it was with those to whom the Lord Jesus said “Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. But ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.” If you are content with merely reading or hearing the Scriptures, and do not come to Christ himself, you stop short of salvation; yea, you stay in a position where you may be capable of the grossest sin, as were these people at Antioch in Pisidia.

28–30. *And though they found the cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulcher. But God raised him from the dead:*

Now the apostle has reached the very heart of his judgement, now he has come to the great corner-stone of the Christian faith. Notice that there are no embellishments here; there is not even an anecdote, or a story, by which he may illustrate the truth he sets forth, but just a plain declaration of the great facts of

the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are the backbone of the gospel; and the more we dwell upon these facts, the better. Let us preach the doctrines that grow out of these facts, for the facts are stubborn things, and if they be backed by the Spirit of God, they will carry all before them.

31. *And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.*

He does not expect them to believe without proofs, but he adduces the proof of the resurrection in the many witnesses who saw him after he had risen.

32, 33. *And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee.*

Writing to the Hebrews, Paul quotes this passage from the Psalms to prove Christ's Godhead and everlasting filiation, so that he evidently saw more than one meaning in this portion of divine teaching, and we do not err when we believe that no Scripture is exhausted by a single explanation. The flowers of God's garden bloom, not only double, but sevenfold; they are continually pouring forth fresh fragrance.

34, 35. *And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

Christ did die, but his precious body was not allowed to see corruption.

26, 37. *For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his father, and saw corruption: but he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.*

So that David was not speaking of himself, but he was speaking of another and higher David, his greater Son, the Son of God, begotten of the Father.

Note how Paul keeps to scripture. An inspired apostle himself, yet he appealed to the Old Testament to support his case. That was the best argument he could possibly use with Jews; and, often, it will be the best that we can use with Gentiles.

38. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:*

Now they have it. Now he brings it out very clearly indeed. Glad tidings are now ringing in their ears.

39. *And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.*

The sins which the law of Moses did not propose to touch, yea, all sins which the law of Moses could only typically remove, all these sins are now really taken away by this glorious Son.

40, 41. *Beware, therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets: Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.*

You cannot imagine anything more appropriate to the occasion, more properly set forth, more bold, more clear; but these men were not prepared to receive it.

This is a noble sermon, but again I remark, how simple it is! Like the sermon of Peter, on the day of Pentecost, it is free from that continual calling out of "Believe, believe, believe," which is the habit of some preachers, who never tell the people what they have to believe. Exhortation is well enough in its place; but you must not have all powder in your gun, there must be some shot also. The apostle has solid facts here which he drives home to the heart and conscience of his hearers; he does not forget that the weight and forge of a sermon must lie in

the distinct truth which is taught in it.

42. *And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.*

They would like to hear the same message; so they said to Paul, “This sermon was to the Jews. Will you not preach to us Gentiles? We have come in here, and heard what you have said; but you did not speak specially to Jesus; will you do so next Sabbath?”

They did not mind hearing sermons twice in those days. We are not often asked to preach the same sermon over again. But these people wanted to know the truth; and, therefore, they asked to have it repeated. If our people will not receive the gospel the first time we preach it, we must tell it to them over and over again. With the hammer of the Word, we must smite the same nail on the head again and, again. Even if we do not utter the same words there must ever be the same subject Sabbath by Sabbath, and week by week.

43, 44. *Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.*

There is something attractive about the gospel. I do not think they sent out a trumpeter; the preaching of the gospel is all the trumpet that is needed to gather the people together. If we will but preach it in the power and plenitude of the Spirit of God, it will soon attract a congregation, as it did in this instance.

45, 46. *But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against these things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold,*

Paul and Barnabas were moved to speak in deep solemnity. In those godly men

the Spirit of God largely dwelt, and in them he revealed his thoughts. They had come to Antioch in pure love to souls; and they had hoped better things of their countrymen than to see them reject the Savior. As an audience, they had been most attentive while Paul recited the history of Israel, and he and Barnabas hoped that many would have believed on the Son of David; and when they found that the frequenters of the synagogue had become envious and jealous because the Gentiles were so eager to hear the Word, then Paul and Barnabas were grievously wounded. The Spirit of God is much more tender than the soul of Paul or Barnabas, and he is sorely grieved when he sees Jesus rejected. It is his office to win for Jesus the love of men, and he is vexed when men turn their backs on the loving Lord.

and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

In consequence of the ill-manners of the Jews they did not turn away from their work. It never entered their minds to give up their ministry because it did not succeed among these Jews. They did not say, "Lo, we turn away from preaching Jesus: we will speak no more in the name of the Lord."

47. *For so hath the Lord commanded you, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.*

God has set Jesus to be a light, and a light he must be. God's appointment is no empty thing. No man thinks of setting up a light if nobody will ever see it; and if God has appointed Christ to be a light, depend upon it some are to see that light. But all men are blind by nature. Alas! it is even so; but if God has set his Son to be a light, I conclude that he is about to open the eyes of the blind, that they may see this light. If I saw a wise man going into a blind asylum, laying on gas or making preparation for the electric light, I should feel sure that he had a view to people who can see; and if none but blind people could come into the building, I should conclude that he anticipated a time when the poor blind folks would find their eyes again, and would be able to use the light. So, as the Lord has set Jesus to be a light, you may be sure that he means to open blind eyes. Jesus will

enlighten the people, souls will be saved. God has set his King upon the holy hill of Zion, and he has not set him there for a King without intending to give him a kingdom. God will not allow his Son to be a Savior who never saves, a Redeemer who does not redeem.

48. *And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord:*

Could you not see their eyes sparkle as they learned that Jesus was their salvation? They sat in the synagogue, where they were only tolerated, the Jews looking very jealously at them; but now they heard good news, for the living God had thought of them and sent to them salvation. No more would they care for the dark eyes of the Jews; they smiled as they saw the door of grace set open before them. Paul and Barnabas must have felt glad to address so glad a congregation. We little guess with what joy the message of mercy would be received by those who had never yet heard it. Go, and see what it will do.

and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

Attempts have been made to prove that these words do not preach predestination; but these attempts so clearly do violence to language that I will not waste time in answering them. He that perishes chooses to perish; but he that is saved is saved because God has chosen to save him. Though some cannot make these statements agree, they are nevertheless equally true—"Thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help found."

49-52. *And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.*

Where is that zeal which counted not its life dear so that it might win Christ? I believe that the killing of a few of our ministers would have prospered

Christianity. However we might mourn over it, and none more than myself, I say the murder of a dozen of them would have been no greater ground for grief than the slaughter of our men by hundreds in a successful fight for hearths and homes. I would count my own blood most profitably shed in so holy a struggle.

How did the gospel prosper aforetime? Were there not some who laid down their lives for it; and did not others walk to victory over their slain bodies, and must it not be so now? If we are to start back because we are afraid of being killed, heaven knows when the gospel is to spread over the world—we do not. What have other missionaries done? Have they not braved death in its direst forms, and preached the Word amid countless dangers? My brethren, we say again, we find no fault, for we, ourselves, might err in the same manner; but we are sure we are therein not like Paul. He went to a place where they stoned him with stones, and dragged him out as dead. Did he say, “Now for the future I will not go where they will ill-treat me?” No, for he says, “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, thrice I suffered shipwreck.”

Acts 14

1-4. *And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.*

Paul's lifelong struggle was to be with Jewish superstition. In Iconium, in Lystra, in Derbe, in Athens, in Corinth, in Rome, he must always be confronting the Judaising spirit; and it was well that he should know all about it that he should be well schooled in it; and it does strike me that God separated him from his mother's womb on purpose that he might go forth to proclaim the gospel instead of law, and shut the mouths of those who were constantly abiding by the traditions of the fathers, instead of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

5, 6. *And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: and there they preached the gospel.*

The name of Christ was there totally unknown. They were a sort of country people, partly pastoral and partly agricultural, who seem to have been deeply sunken in superstition. At the gates of their city there stood a great temple dedicated to Jupiter, and they appear to have been his zealous votaries. Coming

down from the mountain-side Paul and Barnabas enter the town, and when a fitting time has come, they stand up in the marketplace, or the street, and begin to talk concerning Jesus, the Son of God, who had come down from heaven, had suffered and died, and had again ascended up on high. The people gather round them.

Here is an ignorant set of people who worship an image. Why does he not begin by preaching of the deity? Why does he not talk to them of the Trinity in unity? Why does he not try and confute their notions about their gods? No, my dear sir, he will do nothing of the kind; that may be done incidentally, but the first and the last thing that Paul will do at Lystra is, there he will preach the gospel.

8, 9. *And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: the same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,*

Poor fellow! As he listened to Paul's preaching, he thought perhaps—"Well, that looks like true; that seems to be the truth; it is the truth; I am sure it is true; and, if it is true that Jesus Christ is so great a Savior, perhaps I may be healed; these lame legs of mine, which never would carry me anywhere, may yet come straight; I-I—I think they may; I hope they may; I believe they may; I know it can be done if Christ wills it; I believe that, and from what Paul says of Christ's character, I think he must be willing to do it; I will ask the apostle; the first convenient season that I have I will lift up my cry, for I believe it can be done, and I think there is a perfect willingness, both in the mind of the apostle and of the Master that it should be done; I believe it will be done, and that I shall yet stand upright."

10. *Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.*

They preach again. The crowds are still greater, and on one occasion, while Paul is in the middle of a sermon, using his eyes to watch the audience as all preachers should do, and not looking up at the ceiling, or at the gallery-front as some preachers are wont to do, he marks this cripple, fixes his eyes upon him, and looks earnestly in his face. Either by the exercise of his judgment, or by the

promptings of revelation, the apostle gathers that this man has faith—faith to be healed. In order to attract the attention of the people, to glorify the name of Christ, to publish more widely his glorious fame, and to make the miracle well known, Paul stops the sermon, and with a loud voice cries, “Stand upright on thy feet.” The man only needs that gracious command— “Stand upright on thy feet,” and forthwith he leaps out of his infirmiy, and walks freely in the integrity of his heart.

11, 12. *And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.*

The population are all amazed, and knowing that there was a tradition that Jupiter and Mercury had once appeared in that very town, a tradition preserved in the Metamorphoses of Ovid to the present day, they at once conclude that surely Jupiter and Mercury must be come again.They fix upon Barnabas, who was probably the elder and the nobler looking man, for Jupiter; and as Jupiter was always attended by Mercurius, as a messenger, and Mercury was the god of eloquence, they conclude that Paul must be Mercury.

13. *Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.*

They rush to the temple, they tell the priests that the gods have come down. The priests, only too ready to foster popular credulity, and pander to it, bring forth the sacred bullocks and the garlands, and are about to offer sacrifice before Paul and Barnabas.

14-18. *Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you,*

It is not to any man, to any priest, to any order of men, to any being in heaven or earth beside God, that we should burn the incense of worship. We would as soon worship cats with the Egyptians, as popes with the Romanists: we see no difference between the people whose gods grew in their gardens and the sect whose deity is made by their baker. Such vile idolatry is to be loathed. To God alone shall all the praise of Zion ascend.

and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

Such homage these men of God indignantly refuse; they rend their clothes; they beseech them to do no such thing, for they are nothing but men; yet hardly with earnest words can they stay the people.

19. *And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.*

The next day certain Jews came thither and produced a counter irritation in the simple minds of the people. No very difficult task where a rude fanaticism rouses the wild passions of the mob. Such an assembly must rage, whether it he with redundant applause or with derisive jeers. Accordingly, Paul finds himself exposed to peril; he is stoned through the streets, dragged forth as dead, and left by the very men who worshipped him but yesterday as a god, left to die as a villain outside the city gates.

They are about to sacrifice to him: it makes you think of days when the craved cried “Hosanna, Hosanna.” Lo, the apostle rebukes the throng, and nor they are stoning him, and it recalls to your memory the time when the crowd shouted, “Crucify him, crucify him; away with such a fellow from the earth.”

20-22. *Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

The world does not love Christ, or his gospel, an atom more today than it did in Paul's day. "The carnal mind is" still "enmity against God." It is the nature of the wicked to hate the righteous, even as the wolf rages against the sheep. This world cannot be the friend of the friend of God, unless, indeed, Belial can have concord with Christ, and this we know is impossible. In one form or another, the Egyptian will oppress the Israelite till the day of the bringing out with a high hand and an outstretched arm. If today the enmity is restrained in its manifestation, it is because the law of the land, by the good providence of God, does not now allow of the rack, the stake, or the dungeon. Our Lord said to his first disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," and he explained it to mean that men would put them out of the synagogues; yea, that the time would come when those that killed them would think that they did God service. Tribulation of that sort remains up to the measure in which it is not hindered by divine power; the spirit out of which it sprang cannot die till men are renewed. A man's foes are still they of his own household.

23. *And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.*

Paul's preaching had not been in vain. There were some few disciples who remained faithful. His ministry was rewarded and owned of God.

24-28. *And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they*

fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

It was not enough for him to have it handed down that he was the Apostle of Pisidia, but he must go also to Pamphylia; it was not enough that he should be the great preacher of Pampbylia and Pisidia, but he must go also to Attalia; and when he had preached throughout all Asia, he must needs take ship to Greece, and preach there also.

Acts 15

1-5. *And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.*

Paul and Barnabas had been preaching the gospel among the Gentiles with great success, but “certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed,” could not get rid of their old Jewish bigotry, and vehemently urged that the converted Gentiles ought to be circumcised, or else they could not be saved. They made a great clamor over this, and there was no small dissension and disputation. The children of the bondwoman mustered all their forces, while the champions of glorious liberty arrayed themselves for the battle. Paul and Barnabas, those valiant soldiers of the cross, stood, out stoutly against the ritualistic brethren, and told them that the rite of circumcision did not belong to the Gentiles at all, and ought not to be forced upon them; they would not yield their free principles at the dictation of the Judaisers, but scorned to bow their necks to the yoke of bondage. It was agreed to bring the matter up for decision at Jerusalem before the apostles and elders.

6-9. *And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.*

Peter at the great Jerusalem council was enabled through his experience to answer those who said that unless a man was circumcised he could not be saved. Depend upon it, there is nothing like practical work for Christ to teach us Christ's truth. For the most part the heretics of the present day are a clique of literary men, adepts at the pen, but quite unable to speak. It may be that their failure in this direction sours them, and sets them upon opposing the gospel ministry. At any rate they are a set of theorizers who know nothing of practical service for the Lord, and so they make up all manner of nonsense according to their own fancies.

Give a man practical work for Jesus, and keep him at it, and he will, like Peter, learn as he goes on, and, like a river, filter as he flows. Peter could not continue to believe in restricting the gospel to the Jews after the Lord had bidden Cornelius send for him from Joppa, that he might teach him the gospel: his actual service refined his theory.

The Holy Ghost dwells not in unclean hearts, but when the temple of the heart has been purified, there he comes. Though these men had never been circumcised, yet they were purified in heart, for the Spirit of God rested upon them: it was evidently the same Spirit which had descended upon the circumcised ones at Jerusalem, since it produced the same results, "for they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." Now, if the Spirit put no difference between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, why should the church do so?

The fact that the Holy Ghost is given to the hearing of faith, and not as a reward of works, runs like a silver thread through the whole of the Acts of the Apostles: why, then, should men look to the works of the law for that which was never

given except to faith? What an infatuation to look to the mirage when a real well is open at their feet!

10. *Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?*

We are now brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God, a liberty which those who had been in the bondage could best appreciate. Those who are still under legal restrictions feel the pressure of them when they see the liberty of others. We have attained the liberty of the gospel, and we are not called upon to observe days, and months, and years; nor to border our garments with a certain color, nor to trim our hair by rule; neither are we called to practice divers washings and purifyings, or to observe laws and regulations amounting to a continual round of rites. The "free Spirit" dwells in us: to us every place is hallowed; our religion is not of the outward, and in the matter of meats we call nothing common or unclean.

11. *But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.*

Peter was not in a fog about this; his witness is clear as crystal, decisive as the sentence of a judge. He believed that salvation was of God's free favor, and God's almighty power; and he speaks out like a man, "We believe that we are saved by grace." This is the doctrine which will shake the very gates of hell, if it be but faithfully preached. O for an army of witnesses to publish abroad the gospel of grace in its sovereignty, omnipotence, and fullness. If you are ever to get comfort, believe me, dear hearer, you must receive the doctrine of salvation by free grace into your soul as the delight and solace of your heart, for it is the living truth of the living God. Not by ritualism, not by good works, not by our own unaided free will are we saved, but by the grace of God alone.

12-14. *Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to*

take out of them a people for his name.

I wish that the people of God would again wake up to the truth that to gather out a people from among men is the great purpose of present dispensation. It is still true, as James said at the Jerusalem Council, "Simeon hath declared how God at first did visit Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name." We are not to remain clinging to the old wreck with expectation that we shall pump water out of her and get her safe into port. No; the cry is very different—"Take to the lifeboat! Take to the lifeboat!" You are to quit the wreck, and you are to carry away from the sinking mass that which God will save. You must be separate from the old wreck, lest it suck you down to sure destruction. Your only hope of doing good to the world is by yourselves being "not of the world," even as Christ was not of the world. For you to go down to the world's level will neither be good for it nor for you.

15-20. *And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.*

The forms and shapes of modern idols are many and crafty. We see no elephant-headed deity such as is the fear of the Hindus, and no absurd fetish such as the African dreads; but more dangerous, because more subtle and secret, forms of idolatry are allowed to remain in our midst. Oh that the Lord would in his people fulfill the word, "The idols he shall utterly abolish"!

21. *For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.*

Even as today men see outward rites that God has given, but see not their glorious meaning, so was it with Israel in the wilderness: they saw sacrifices, but they knew not the Great Sacrifice; they saw the oil and the water, but they knew not the Holy Ghost; they saw ten thousand tokens dear and manifest of the ever-blessed Messiah, but they did not perceive him so as to know him when he came. Every type and ceremony might say, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”

22-24. *Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:*

Wherever the apostles went, the Jews who believed not, being moved with envy, stirred up the people against them. They could not endure to hear of the salvation of the Gentiles by grace through faith: it grated on their car, for they thought that this doctrine was contrary to the law of Moses in which they boasted. They were children of the bondwoman, under the old covenant of works, and they could not endure that the children of the promise should come to the inheritance. They struggled and rebelled against the gospel of salvation by grace, for it went against their natural pride and their national exclusiveness. Yea, and even when any of them, as blessed be the grace of God was the case, became converted, the old man was still within them, and the spirit of bondage was still apt to assert itself.

Those who had been of the sect of the Pharisees brought a good share of Pharisaic tendencies with them into the church, and these were dangerous to the young kingdom of Christ. I scarcely know whether legal principles were not able to do more mischief inside the church by perverting pure doctrine than they could do outside the church by exciting persecution.

25, 26. *It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

The apostles were always to the front where the shots were flying the fastest, and with the deadliest aim; there they stood, the officers of the army of Christ

27-29. *We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.*

Things offered to idols are offered to devils, for a mere idol is nothing in the world; its evil lies in its representing a principle, which is opposed to the one true, invisible God. The superstitions, which degrade humanity, which are an insult to our manhood, all these are most pleasing to Satan, and approved of by him, and so they are fitly described as “the works of the devil.”

30-41. *So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who*

departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; and Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

When Paul and Barnabas set out on their missionary enterprise, they were attended by Mark. As long as they were sailing across the blue waters, and as long as they were in the island of Cyprus, Mark stuck to them. Nay, while they traveled along the coast of Asia Minor, we find they had John Mark to be their minister; but the moment they went up into the inland countries, among the robbers and the mountain streams—as soon as ever the road began to be a little too rough, John Mark left them; his missionary zeal had oozed out.

At a later period, Mark was the cause of a sharp contention between Paul and Barnabas. Paul would not have Mark with him any longer. He could not tame him; he did not believe in these impulsive people, who could not hold on under difficulties; but Barnabas, knowing him better—for Mark was sister's son to Barnabas—and feeling a kinsman's lenity to his faults, insisted upon it that they should take John Mark; and the altercation so violent between Paul and Barnabas that they separated on this account, and would not proceed together on their divine mission. Yet Barnabas was right, and I think that Paul was not wrong.

Barnabas was right, in his mild judgment of Mark, for he was a sound believer at bottom, and, notwithstanding this fault, he was a real, truehearted disciple. We find him afterwards reconciled entirely to the apostle Paul. Paul wrote to Timothy, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry;" and we find Paul affectionately mentioning "Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas," which shows, on the one hand, the apostle's Christian candor and kindness, and, on the other hand, that Mark had retrieved his character by perseverance.

Acts 16

1-3. *Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.*

We are not at a loss to tell who instructed youthful Timothy. In the first chapter of 1 Timothy Paul says, “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.” No doubt grandmother Lois and mother Eunice united in teaching the little one. Who should teach the children but the parents? Timothy’s father was a Greek, and probably a heathen, but his child was happy in having a venerable grandmother, so often the dearest of all relatives to a little child. He had also a gracious mother, once a devout Jewess, and afterwards also a firmly believing Christian, who made it her daily pleasure to teach her own dear child the Word of the Lord.

4-8. *And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.*

The apostle was like Abraham of old; he went forth, not knowing whither he went. There was a certain path which he must take, and when he strove to turn either to the right hand or to the left, the Spirit directly forbade him, and he was compelled to go on till he came to the sea-port of Troas.

9. *And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.*

Our dreams often follow the leading thoughts of the day; or, if not of the day, yet the chief thoughts that are upon the mind. Paul dreams about mission work, for his heart is in it. I should not wonder if some before me, who are deeply engaged in earnest Christian work, have often dreamt about their Sunday-school, or their mission-station. Where the mind goes when we are awake, it often goes when we are asleep. This vision that appeared to Paul was supernatural; and was an indication of what God wanted him to do.

10. *And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.*

In the vision, the man prayed, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” The best help that Paul could render to the Macedonians was “to preach the gospel unto them.” The best help you can give men socially is to help them religiously; and the best religious help is to preach the gospel to them.

11, 12. *Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.*

Waiting to know what they were to do. In God’s work, we are not to go on in blundering haste. Sometimes, a little waiting may be good for us; and by waiting, we may find out the true path of success.

13. *And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made;*

The introduction of Christianity into Europe is a very humble affair. There is nothing very stately in the architecture of the house where Jesus is first preached; in fact, we have no evidence that there was any building at all—probably it was an open-air service by the river-side.

There were not enough Jews in the merely military city of Philippi to admit of the erection of a synagogue, and therefore, a few women met in a quiet spot by the river's bank. A stranger might walk through Philippi a hundred times and never know of the existence of the Jews' meeting-place, it was a nook so retired and frequented by so few. Heathendom might seem to the ordinary observer to be universal in its reign; for who would care to notice the feeble company who met in retirement, to offer prayers unto the Most High God of Israel?

and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

This was probably the first religious meeting of Christians that was ever held in Europe. It is remarkable that it was a prayer-meeting, a prayer-meeting attended by women, a prayer-meeting to which two ministers came, and preached the gospel to the women who resorted thither. To be able to be present at a prayer-meeting ought always to be reckoned a great privilege to all of us who are Christians. In this way the gospel first came to us; in this way the gospel will be best preserved to us; and in this way we may best obtain guidance from God as to how we may carry the gospel to others.

14. *And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira,*

She was a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira. That city was famous for its dyeing trade, which had flourished there ever since the days of Homer. The mode of producing a peculiarly delicate and valuable purple seems to have been known to the women of Thyatira. It may be that Lydia had come to Philippi upon a journey, or that while her manufactures were carried on at Thyatira, she resided during a part of the year at Philippi, to dispose of her goods. The communication

between the two places was very easy, and she may have frequently made the journey; at any rate, providence brings her there when the hour of her conversion is come. You will remember that Thyatira was situated in that pelt of the country into which Paul was forbidden by the Spirit to go and preach; therefore, had Lydia been at home, she could not have heard the truth; and as “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God,” she must have remained unconverted. But providence brings her to Philippi at the right time.

which worshipped God, heard us:

The woman did not know the Savior; she did not understand the things which make for her peace yet she knew many truths were excellent stepping-stones to a knowledge of Jesus. If not a Jewess by birth, she was a proselyte of the gate, and therefore well acquainted with the oracles of God; she was one who worshipped God; nay, she was one of the most devout of God’s worshippers among the Jews. Though she was far away from the synagogue—some forget the Sabbath when they travel in foreign lands—yet when the day came round, she was found with that little handful at the river-side oratory.

As in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, the Scriptures she had read, though they were not understood for want of some man to guide her, had prepared her mind: the ground had been ploughed ready for the good seed; it was not a hard rock as in the gaoler’s case. She worshipped God; worshipped him in sincerity; worshipped him looking for the coming of the Messiah, Israel’s consolation; and so her mind was prepared for the reception of the gospel.

whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

She did not open her own heart. Her prayers did not do it; Paul did not do it; the Lord himself must open the heart, to receive the things which make for our peace. To operate savingly upon human hearts belongs to God alone. We can get at human brains, but God alone can arouse human affections. We may reach them, we grant you, in the natural and common way, but so to reach them, as that the enemy of God shall become his friend, and that the stony heart shall be turned into flesh, is the work of grace, and nothing short of divine power can accomplish it.

15. *And when she was baptized, and her household,*

As soon as she had believed in Jesus, she put on, together with her household, the profession of her faith in Christ Jesus. Happy Lydia, to have a household which believed in Jesus! Happy Lydia, to see them all baptized with her!

she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

Lydia was evidently a woman of some property. The purple which she sold was an expensive article. She seems to have been engaged in business on her own account; and when Paul met with her, she was far off from her workshop and her home. She had a house, therefore, in the place to which she had come to sell her purple; and she "constrained" the men of God to make use of her house, and to tarry there. Thus was Christianity brought into Europe, for which we praise the name of the Lord.

16. *And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying.*

She professed to tell fortunes, and to speak under inspiration. She was really "possessed" by an evil spirit.

17, 18. *The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.*

Here was an evil spirit bearing witness to the truth of God, and it grieved Paul. When you hear a bad man ridiculing religion, do not be surprised; what else could you expect from him? But if you heard the devil recommending Christ, then you ought to be grieved, for the Lord Jesus does not want patronage or praise from Satan. Men would begin to suspect that Christ was in league with

Satan, if Satan began to speak well of Christ.

Dread to be spoken well of by ungodly men; for there is great danger in such praise. There may be a motive at the bottom of the flattery, which may be full of mischief. Paul, being grieved, silenced the demon, and cast him out of the damsel. Like his Lord, he would not allow the devil to testify concerning himself and his mission.

19-21 *And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the market-place unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates,*

They dragged them into the Forum, the place where the courts usually sat, and brought them before the magistrates, "saying"—what? "These men have cured a demoniac, they have performed a miracle, and cast a devil out of a young woman"? Oh! no; there would have been no wrong in that, so they must invent a charge. What do they say?

saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

They did not know that Paul himself was a Roman citizen, or they surely would not have brought such a charge as that against him.

22. *And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.*

They beat them first, and tried them afterwards. That is often the rule with those who persecute God's people: let them be hanged out of the way, and then we will enquire what they teach.

23, 24. *And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made*

their feet fast in the stocks.

To any who judged according to the sight of the eyes, it must have seemed a most unfortunate circumstance that a poor woman having a spirit of divination came in Paul's way. It was a sad ruffling of the gentle stream of prosperity when, on account of his casting the demon out of her, the apostle and his companion were dragged by the mob before the magistrates, shamefully beaten, and thrown into prison. Now, the preacher's mouth would be stopped, so far as the people of Philippi outside the jail gates were concerned. No more of those delightful prayer-meetings and Bible readings, and openings up of the Scriptures. Surely there was cause for the deepest regret. It might have appeared so, but like a great many other incidents connected with Christian work, the matter could not be judged by the outward appearance, for the Lord had a secret and blessed design, which was being answered by the apparent disaster.

The members of this elect family could by no other means be brought to Christ, but through Paul and Silas being cast into prison; and, therefore, into prison they must go, to do more by night in their bonds than they could have done by day if they had been free, and to bring to Christ some that would be more illustrious trophies of the grace of God than any they could have gathered had they been preaching in the streets of Philippi. God knows where it is best for his servants to be, and how it is best for them to be. If he foresees that they will do more good with their backs scarred than they would have done if they had escaped the flagellation, then their bodies must bear the marks of the Lord Jesus, and they must rejoice to have it so.

25. *And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God:*

Another prayer-meeting, and a praise-meeting, too. There were only two persons at it; but they "prayed, and sang praises unto God."

26. *And the prisoners heard them.*

Paul and Silas were in the lower prison. The sound of their prayer and praise rose up through the different tiers of cells where other prisoners were confined.

And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

This was no common earthquake. An ordinary earthquake might have brought the prison down about their ears; but it would not have loosed the bands of the prisoners.

27. *And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.*

For the law was that, if a jailer lost a prisoner, he was to suffer whatever penalty the prisoner would have suffered. He therefore knew that, in all probability, his own life would be taken; and, strange to say, to save his life he would kill himself. Suicide is ever absurd and unreasonable. The worst that could happen to him would be to die by the sword of justice; and to escape from that, he tries to die by the sword of a suicide.

28. *But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.*

Every prisoner was loosed from his bands, but not one had escaped; nor had any even attempted to escape, which was another miracle; for men who see their bands broken, and the prison doors open, are pretty sure to run away. These men did not, for a heavenly charm was upon them. They kept in their cells, so that Paul could cry out to the jailor, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here."

29. *Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling,*

Conscious of the supernatural, compelled to feel the hand which he had never perceived before, he hastened into the inner prison, where he had thrust the servants of Christ;

and fell down before Paul and Silas,

Whom he had handled so roughly just now;

30. *And brought them out, and said, Sirs,*

What a word to address to those who were still in his charge as prisoners!

what must I do to be saved?

A terse, laconic question, respectful, earnest, to the point, having not a word too much or too little in it

31. *And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

That answer was very like his short question in fullness of meaning: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” This was condensed gospel for him; and then followed a blessed commentary upon it, when the apostle spoke the word of the Lord both to him and to all his house; all this lit up his mind, which was already willing to receive the truth, a mind which, from the very habit of obedience, was quick and prompt to accept the sway of the Lord Jesus. He received the word in the love of it most sweetly, God the Holy Spirit blessing it to him while he listened. There was plain teaching, and a simple heart to receive it, and the two together made quick work of it, and made resplendent that strange midnight which was henceforth in that house regarded as the beginning of days.

32. *And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*

There was not a solitary exception, no one was away from that sermon in a jail. His wife, his children, his servants, all that were in his house, listened to the heavenly message. Though it may seem a very trite thing to say, it is nevertheless exceedingly important, if we are to have household conversion, that

there should be a household hearing of the word. This is the chosen instrumentality, and we must bring all under the instrumentality if we wish them to obtain the blessing.

The Romans did not select for jailers the most tender hearted of men. Frequently they were old legionaries who had seen service in bloody wars, and been inured to cruel fights; and, when these men settled down as, in a measure, pensioners of the empire, they were allotted such offices as that which the jailer held. In the society and associations of a jail there was very little that could be likely to improve the mother, to benefit the children, or elevate the servants. They were, then, most unpromising hearers. Yet how often are the most unlikely persons convinced of sin, and led to the Savior.

33. *And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes;*

Here is work for himself, and work for gentle hands to do, to assuage the pains of those poor bleeding backs; to wash out the grit that had come there through their lying on their backs on the dungeon floor, and to mollify and bind up their wounds.

and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

Note, that though they were thus unlikely hearers, yet they were immediately converted, there and then. It took but a short time. I do not know how long Paul’s sermon was; he was a wise man, and I should not think he would preach a long sermon in the dead of the night, just after an earthquake. I have no doubt it was a simple exposition of the doctrine of the cross. And then Silas talked too; perhaps, when Paul had done, Silas gave a little exhortation, a brief address to finish up with, and fill up anything which Paul had left out. The teaching was soon over, and at its close the jailer, his wife, his children (if he had any), his servants, and indeed all that were in the house, avowed themselves to be believers.

In almost every case in Scripture where you read of a household baptism, you are distinctly informed that they were also a believing household. In the case of Lydia it may not be so; but then there are remarkable circumstances about her

case which render that information needless. In this instance they were all believers, and, therefore, they were all of them baptized. First, “HE” was baptised—the jailor; he was ready first to submit himself to the ordinance in which he declared himself to be dead to the world, and risen anew in Christ Jesus. Then “all his” followed. What a glorious baptism, amidst the glare of the torches that night! perhaps in the prison hath, or in the impluvium which was usually in the center of most oriental houses, or perhaps the stream that watered Philippi ran by the prison wall, and was used for the occasion. It matters not, but into the water they descended, one after another, mother, children, servants; and Paul and Silas stood there delighted to aid them in declaring themselves to be on the Lord’s side, “buried with him in baptism.”

And this was done, mark you, straightway. There was not one who wished to have it put off till he had tried himself a little, and seen whether he was really regenerated. In those days no one had any scruple or objection to obey; none advocated the following of some ancient and doubtful tradition; all were obedient to the divine will. No one shrank from baptism for fear that water might damage his health, or in some way cause him inconvenience; but he and all his, wishing, to follow the plain example of our Lord Jesus Christ, were baptized, and that straightway—at once, and on the spot. No minister has any right to refuse to baptise any person who professes faith in Jesus Christ, unless there be some glaring fact to cast doubt upon the candidate’s sincerity. I, for one, would never ask from any person weeks and months of delay, in which the man should prove to me that he was a believer; but I would follow the example of the apostle. The gospel of Christ was preached, the people were converted, and they were baptized, and all perhaps in the space of an hour.

34. *And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.*

It is not easy to fit up a feast in the middle of the night, but the good wife did her best; cold meats were brought forth from the stores, and such good cheer as they had was set out, so that the two good men, who, no doubt, needed refreshment, were sufficiently supplied. I think I see that midnight festival even now. How the young children caught up every word which was spoken by the holy men, and how glad they were to see them at their table! They all believed and were all baptized, and therefore they were all eager to do something for the men of God. How pleased they were to fetch the good men up into the best parlor-how eager

to put them into the easiest chairs and let them sit in comfort, or recline at their ease. They did not wait till morning, but showed kindness without delay. This is the sort of convert the church needs: one who delights to serve the Lord, and is no sooner converted than he sets to work in his own hearty way. How lovingly the jailer looked upon his two instructors, how tenderly he washed their stripes. As he had thrown them into the inner prison, so he brought them into his own house. What overflowing joy was in his heart! Methinks while he was waiting at the table he would every now and then stop and wonder at what grace had done.

35, 36. *And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.*

Observe that when the magistrates tell him that Paul is to go, he does not violate their order out of zeal for the faith. He had no right to keep Paul as a guest in his house against the magistrates' will, or he would gladly have retained him; but being bound by his office and by the fact that his apartments were part of the jail, when Paul was bidden to go, he said to him, "Now, therefore, go in peace." The words look somewhat curt, but no doubt he uttered them in such a kind and courteous manner that the apostle quite understood him.

37-40. *But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.*

I dare say the jailer came down to see him there; so that if they could not meet at the jail without breach of regulations, they could meet at Lydia's hospitable abode. My own belief is that he and Lydia were ever afterwards two of the

kindest friends that the apostle ever had, and were chief among those who contributed of their substance to his necessities. Paul took no money from any but the Philippians. Though other churches offered to contribute, Paul declined; but when the Philippians sent to him once and again, he accepted their gifts as a sacrifice of sweet smell. He said within himself, “All the family send this gift; all Lydia’s household and all the jailer’s household are believers, so that no member of the family will grudge what is sent to me.”

Acts 17

1-4. *Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: and Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.*

In Thessalonica the conversions to the faith were remarkable. Paul came there without prestige, without friends, when he was in the very lowest condition; for he had just been beaten and imprisoned at Philippi, and had fled from that city. Yet it mattered not in what condition the ambassador might be; God, who worketh mighty things by weak instruments, blessed the word of his servant Paul. No doubt when the apostle went into the synagogue to address his own countrymen he had great hopes that, by reasoning with them out of their own Scriptures, he might convince them that Jesus was the Christ.

5, 6. *But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.*

It became a matter of talk all over the city, and the Jews in their violence helped to make the matter more notorious; for the mobs in the street and the attack upon the house of Jason all stirred the thousand tongues of rumor. Everybody spoke of the sudden appearance of three poor Jews, of their remarkable teaching in the

synagogue, and of the conversion of a great multitude of devout Greeks, and of the chief women not a few.

6. *And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;*

When disturbances arise in a state, and rebellions and mutinies cause blood to be shed, it is still the custom to cry, “The Christians have done this.” In the days of Jesus we know that it was laid to the charge of our blessed and divine Master, that he was a stirrer of sedition, whereas he himself had refused to be a king, when his followers would have taken him by force to make him one, for he said, “My kingdom is not of this world;” yet was he crucified under the two false charges of sedition and blasphemy.

The same thing occurred with the Apostles. Wherever they went to preach the gospel, the Jews who opposed them sought to stir up the refuse of the city to put an end to their ministry; and then, when a great tumult had been made by the Jews themselves, who had taken unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring him out to the people, then the Jews laid the tumult and the uproar at the door of the Apostles, saying, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.”

7. *Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.*

There is another King, one Jesus; and, as believers in him, we are more truly citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem than of any city or country upon earth. Our divine Lord has called out believers from among the sons of men to make them a peculiar people, a nation set apart unto himself.

8-11. *And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went*

into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Oh, for the Berean spirit back again, to search the Scriptures whether these things be so. I would like to see a huge pile of all the books, good and bad that were ever written, prayer-books, and sermons, and hymn-books, and all, smoking like Sodom of old, if the reading of those books keeps you away from the reading of the Bible; for a ton weight of human literature is not worth an ounce of Scripture; one single drop of the essential tincture of the word of God is better than a sea full of our commentings and sermonisings, and the like. The word, the simple, pure, infallible Lord of God, we must live upon if we are to become strong against error, and tenacious of truth.

12-15. *Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.*

Paul must have felt disappointed with his own countrymen; indeed, he had often cause to do so. His heart was affectionately warm toward them, but their hearts were very bitter towards him, reckoning him to be a pervert and an apostate. But if he seemed to fail with the Jews, it is evident that he was abundantly successful with the Gentiles.

16-18. *Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then*

certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

Graduates in the university of self-importance, full of ignorance and equally full of pride, they scarcely deign to give Christ a hearing, and hardly go as far as the Athenians who said, “What will this babbler say?” Nothing shuts the heart more completely against the knowledge of God than the conceit that we know already and need no teaching from above.

19-21. *And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)*

It were hard to say which has the stronger power over the human mind—antiquity or novelty. While men will frequently dote upon the old, they are most easily dazzled by the new. Anything new has at least one attraction. Saltless spirits consider that the new must be better than the old. Though often disappointed, they are still ready to be caught by the same bait, and like the Athenians of Mass Hill, spend their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing.

22. *Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.*

If Paul met with a Scythian, he spoke to him in the Barbarian tongue, and not in classic Greek. If he met a Greek, he spoke to him as he did at the Areopagus, with language that was fitted for the polished Athenian. He was all things to all men, that he might by all means save some. So with you, Christian people: your one business in life is to lead men to believe in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and every other thing should be made subservient to this one object;

if you can but get them saved, everything else will come right in due time. Mr. Hudson Taylor, a dear man of God, who has labored much in Inland China, finds it helpful to dress as a Chinaman, and wear a pigtail. He always mingles with the people, and as far as possible lives as they do. This seems to me to be a truly wise policy. I can understand that we shall win upon a congregation of Chinese by becoming as Chinese as possible, and if this be the case we are bound to be Chinese to the Chinese to save the Chinese.

23. *For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.*

Blindly feeling after God, yet without truly knowing him, what could they do? They could rise to no great height; they could accomplish but little. Men such as they were reared an altar, and inscribed thereon, “To the unknown god; “but what kind of prayer is that which is offered to a god whom we do not know? What comfort can come out of an unknown god? What peace, what rest, what joy, can come from a being after whom we grope in the dark, but whom we do not know? Not to know the only true God, is death, death even to the noblest spirits among us, much more terribly death to those who, knowing nothing of God, seek that which will please self, indulge their vile lusts, and follow their unbridled passions!

24. *God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;*

When men talk of holy places they seem to be ignorant of the use of language. Can holiness dwell in bricks and mortar? Can there be such a thing as a sanctified steeple? Can it possibly happen that there can be such a thing in the world as a moral window or a godly door post? I am lost in amazement, utterly lost, when I think how addled men’s brains must be when they impute moral virtues to bricks and mortar, and stones, and stained glass. Pray how deep Doth this consecration go, and how high? Is every crow that flies over the edifice at that time in solemn air? Certainly it is as rational to believe that, as to conceive that every worm that is eating the body of an Episcopalian is a consecrated worm, and therefore there must necessarily be a brick wall, or a wide gravel-path to protect the bodies of the sanctified from any unhallowed worms that might

creep across from the Dissenters' side of the cemetery. I say again, such child's play, such Popery, such Judaism, is a disgrace to the century. And yet, notwithstanding, we all find ourselves at divers times and seasons indulging in it.

25. *Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;*

Hear ye the Lord's own words: "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?"

26, 27. *And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:*

When man disobeyed his God he died spiritually, and that death consisted in the separation of his soul from God. From that moment man began to think that God was far away, and this has since been his religion in all ages.

Either he has said, "There is no God"; or he has believed the visible creation to be God, which is much the same as having no God; or else he has thought God to be some far-away, mysterious Being, who takes no note of man. Even after obtaining a better conception of God, he has thought him hard to find and hard to be entreated of. Because his own heart is far from God, he imagines that God's heart is far from him. But it is not so. The living God is not far from any one of us; for "In him we live, and move, and have our being."

The nearness of God to man is a teaching of revelation. Look back to the record of the Garden of Eden, and see an early evidence there of God's nearness to man. Adam, having transgressed, hid himself among the trees of the garden; but in his hiding-place God sought him, and the voice of the Lord God was heard, walking among the trees of the garden, and saying, "Adam, where art thou?" Man will not seek God, but God seeks man.

28. *For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.*

The heathen described their fabled deity, Jove, as sitting far aloft, regardless of the common affairs of this lower world. Upon a few kings and princes he might turn an observant eye, but the most of men were creatures far too insignificant to affect the mind of Jove. Whether they lived or died was nothing to him; they fulfilled their destinies, and passed away, while Jove remained serenely still, or nodded as his august will might be.

Not such is Jehovah, the God of heaven and of earth. Though he is so great a God that the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, yet he deigns to dwell with the man who is of a contrite and humble spirit. God has not left us as the ostrich leaves her young. Say not that we are left without a friend to care for us: our Maker has not gone away; he has not shut up the gates of heaven; he has not closed his ear from hearing, neither has he restrained his hand from helping us, for in him we live and move and have our being.

29. *Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.*

The germs, the vileness, the essence of our own sin, has lain in this—that we have given to sin and to idols things that belong unto God. "Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and modest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them, and tookest thy broidered garments and coveredst them, and thou hast set mine oil and mine incense before them. My meat also which I gave thee, fine flour, and oil, and honey, wherewith I fed thee, thou hast even set it before them for a sweet savor."

30. *And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:*

This is the universal call. "Repent ye, send believe the gospel." In this there is comfort of hope for all who desire to come to God.

31. *Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained;*

if in any testimony concerning Christ the doctrine that he shall come a second time to judge the world were utterly neglected such a testimony would not be a complete gospel.

whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

The very staple of the preaching of the apostles was the resurrection of the dead. The apostles when they preached always testified concerning the resurrection of Jesus, and the consequent resurrection of the dead. It appears that the Alpha and the Omega of their gospel was the testimony that Jesus Christ died and rose again from the dead according to the Scriptures.

32-34. *And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.*

We need not care because of these wise men, for if they believe not, but becloud the gospel, yet God abideth faithful. If over there in the groves where Socrates and Plato gathered disciples by their philosophy, if over there, I say, there should not be found a single philosopher who believes in God, so much the worse for the philosophers, but it does, not affect the gospel or our faith in it: if they believe not, he abideth faithful. If Paul at the Areopagus gets no sympathy except from two or three, and in fact they have only asked him there to “hear what this babbler saith,” and though they all as they go home say that Paul is beside himself, and mad, and a setter forth of strange gods, yet Paul is right, and the Lord abideth faithful.

Acts 18

1. *After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth:*

Another most important city of Greece, where he struck at the very center of the country by preaching the gospel, since these were the centers of commerce, and also of literature.

2. *And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come item Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.*

Lodged with them.

3, 4. *And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: or by their occupation they were tent makers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.*

He stepped into the synagogue, and when the time came for strangers to address the audience he began to argue that Jesus was the tame Messiah.

Nor did he argue in vain, for there were some who were persuaded. He endeavored to persuade them all, both the Jews and the Gentiles, who came together to listen to him.

5. *And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.*

He may net have brought out the whole truth at first, but argued little by little to bring them, as it were, up the steps till they should be prepared to receive the grand doctrine that Jesus is the anointed one. HIS spirit was pressed at last to come to that point more fully

6. *And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.*

Oh! what a blessed "from henceforth" that was for you and for me! He no longer confines his ministry to Jews, but goes out seeking the Gentiles—takes up his true commission—becomes the apostle of the Gentiles. But let all of us take heed of opposing the gospel, because it is not to be trifled with impunity. A time comes at last when God's gospel seems to have done with us. Its ministers say, "We are clean." They shake off the dust of their feet, and they go elsewhere to proclaim the gospel to others who may be less opposed to it.

What a thing to be able to say, "I am clean." I wonder how many in this house of prayer could say that of everybody round about them, "I am clean. The blood be on your own heads. I am clean. I have spoken to you about Christ. I have warned you. I have invited you." "Night and day with tears," as he says elsewhere. "I have pleaded with you, and now I am clean.

I am clean." You know there is many a man that is clean in the blood of Christ in that sense who has not yet discharged his obligations to his fellow men, and cannot say, "I am clean." I thought it a grand thing of George Fox, the Quaker, when he was dying, when he said, "I am clean; I am clean of the blood of all men." To the best of his knowledge he had fearlessly proclaimed all the truth that he knew, where-over he had opportunity. O ministers of Christ, teachers of the young, and all you that know Christ, the Holy Spirit be upon you, so that you may speak the gospel till you can say, "I am clean."

7. *And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.*

"The nearer the church, the farther from God." they say; but it was not so in this

case. He was one that worshipped God and his house joined hard to the synagogue.

8. *And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.*

That is the old-fashioned way, you know—"hearing, believed, and were baptized." The new fashioned way is baptized, perhaps hear, and very likely do not believe at all. That is not according to the line of Scripture.

9. *Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:*

Old means and methods are quite sufficient to save souls. Our Lord did not say, "Paul, be not afraid, but deliver a Sunday afternoon lecture with a nonsensical title and little or no gospel in it." No, no; but "Speak, and hold not thy peace, for I have much people in this city." God's way of saving souls is the best way, after all. You and I may get up all sorts of inventions, and he may wink at our follies, and let us go on with them, but his way of saving souls is speaking the gospel, and nothing other than the gospel.

10. *For I am with thee,*

The Apostle Paul was about to be placed in imminent peril. He was to be brought before the Roman governor Gallio. The Jews, rank and rabble, were hopeful that they would get him condemned to death. In this threatening crisis the Lord Jesus would give him a word of comfort to strengthen him, that his courage might not fail. The best, the most assuring word that the Savior could speak to his servant was this, "I am with thee."

Nothing in heaven or earth could be more fitted to cheer his tried spirit. To know that Jesus was with him, approving, supporting, defending him, was a safeguard against fear. Years afterwards, when Paul had to stand before the Roman emperor, whose will was absolute, whose fiat could have put him to instant death, he had no man who dare stand by him. A poor despired servant of a

despised Master, he was not then cast down or disheartened, for he says, "Nevertheless, the Lord stood by me." Under the worst circumstances, true Christians find the richest comfort if they do but know that Jesus is with them.

and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

You and I are bound to preach the gospel, even if never a soul were converted by it; for the great object of the gospel is the glory of God, amid God is glorified even in those who reject the gospel. Still, it is a very sweet help to earnestness, when we know that we shall not labor in vain, or spend our strength for nought. "I have much people in this city" nerves Paul to go forth and tell out bravely in every place that word which is to bring the people of God home to himself.

11. *And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them.*

Farmers like to plough good soil, where they expect large harvests. So Paul, who was accustomed to make roving visits to places, on this occasion settled down for a long time—even for a year and a half. It would pay to do it, for God had much people in that city.

12–15. *And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat. Saying, This fellow*

"This fellow," says our Bible but they did not say that. They had not got any word bad enough, so they said "this"—

persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.

I dare say you have heard Gallio condemned. They used to say in prayer, “Such and such a person went on, Gallio like, caring for none of these things”; but in truth Gallio does not deserve to be so condemned. It is no business of the civil magistrate to inquire into the religions of the people brought before him. It is out of his province. He was quite right when he said, “If it be a question of words, and names, and of your law, look ye to it. I will be no judge of such matters.” If the kings and queens of this world had been half as sensible as Gallio. There had been no stakes in Smithfield, there bad been no prisons to lock up the Puritans. Religion would be let alone, which is the one thing it wants—free church and free state. We want neither the governor’s help, nor the governor’s hindrance. If he will kindly let us alone, it is all we ask from him; and so far Gallio is to be commended. But I do not think he acted thus out of any intelligent scruples on that point. He is to be condemned because of the motive. No doubt he was indifferent, and here may none of us imitate him. That he was indifferent and careless is certain, for he did not do his duty. It was his duty to let this good man alone, but it was not his duty to allow the Gentiles, on the other hand, to begin beating the Jews. If there is six of one, there should be half a dozen of the other, and so we do not admire him when we read,

16–17. *And he drave them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.*

“You came here,” he said, “to accuse Paul, to get him beaten: now the mob is beating you, and serve you right. I shall not interfere. Why did you come here at all to plague me with your questions? Why did you interfere with Paul?” But I should think that this ruler of the synagogue must have opened his eyes when he found himself being beaten, instead of the persons whom he desired to have beaten. It is singular that this name Sosthenes should be used, when further up we find another ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, who wins a believer in Christ. “This was no doubt, one they had set up, instead of Crispus, having rejected Crispus for accepting Christ. And yet this man, Sosthenes, bears the same name as one that is spoken of as a brother in Christ afterwards. I wonder whether that beating did him good—whether, in the providence of God, he was led to ace the hand of providence in this beating falling upon him, instead of Paul; and whether this ruler of the synagogue, who ousted a better man, did himself become a Christian. Let us hope it was so.

18. *And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.*

Most probably not Paul, but Aquila had shorn his head, because usually Luke puts the man first. “Aquila, and his wife Priscilla”; but here, in order to state that Aquila had made a vow, he put it, “Priscilla and Aquila.” I think it very questionable that Paul ever shaved his head in that way. I think it was Aquila. If Paul did it, I think he must have been under a sort of mental aberration, as he once or twice besides may have been thought to have been. Even he who, above all men, had cast out Jewish rites and ceremonies, yet, you remember, took Timothy and circumcised him—a most extraordinary action to do, as in this case, if indeed it was he who had shorn his head.

19. *And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.*

Though he had turned away from them, yet still his heart is after his own country.

20–23. *When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not: But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will.*

Oh! how wise it is to say that, when we are making plans and promises, “If God will.” The short way is to put a little “D.V.,” which means that you are ashamed to say, “If God will.”

And he sailed from Ephesus. And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the

disciples.

For you not only want planting, but strengthening. Young saints, like young plants, want much watering, and Paul took care of them. Evangelists have not half done their duty when they stir up a community unless they go and seek after those who are converted, to strengthen them. Hence the essential need of a permanent pastorate over churches.

24–25. *And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord knowing only the baptism of John.*

He had not got farther than that; but it is always well to tell out what you do know. It is the way to learn more; and we doubt not that many a half-instructed Christian is doing good in his way, and it is not for is to stop him, or to find fault with him, but rather quietly to endeavor to tell him more of the truth. Paul did not say, “Now, Apollos, you must stop this, you know. You had better study. You do not know enough yet,” but he let him tell out what he did know.

26. *And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.*

Apollos teaches very eloquently; but still there is a lack about his teaching. He has not yet reached the full chord; he does not sound out the blessed music of the gospel to perfection. Aquila and Priscilla ask him into their tent warehouse, and they say to him, “Dear friend, do you notice, you went just so far, but you should have gone a little farther. You spoke about the Lamb of God; but you did not tell them that Jesus was the Lamb of God, and that he had died to take away sin.” Apollos replied, “I pray you, tell me all about it.” And when they further informed him of the death, and the resurrection, and the ascension of the Lord Jesus, and of the coming of the Holy Ghost, Apollos said, “Thank you. Thank you. Now I have grand truths to preach, and my message will be more full and gracious than it has been. I shall go forth to the synagogue tomorrow to tell them

about the Messiah who has truly come, and I shall speak with greater freedom concerning him."

27, 28. *And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, allowing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.*

Apollos, following Paul at Corinth, did useful service by confirming those who had already believed in the Lord Jesus. "He mightily convinced the Jews"; and in doing this he screened believing Gentiles from many a rude assault. He disputed with all his might, and with great fervor of spirit, against those who tried to subvert the faith of the Christians.

Acts 19

1, 2. *And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?*

Our Revised Version reads it, “Did ye receive the Holy Ghost when ye believed?” and others who are probably quite as accurate read it, “Are ye receiving the Holy Ghost now that ye have believed?” It does not matter one atom which way you read it: all the renderings come to this—Do you see a connection between your believing and the Holy Ghost? Did you receive him when you believed? Have you received him since you believed? Are you daily receiving him as you believe? That is the subject which is now before us—the Holy Spirit in our hearts as believers. Has your faith been sealed by the impress of the Holy Ghost?

We cannot suppose that the Holy Ghost brought forth the best wine at first, and that his operations gradually deteriorated. It is a rule of the kingdom to keep the best wine to the last, and therefore I conclude that you and I are not left to partake of the dregs, but that those works of the Holy Spirit which are at this time vouchsafed to the Church of God are every way as valuable as those earlier miraculous gifts which have departed from us. The work of the Holy Spirit, by which men are quickened from their death in sin, is not inferior to the power which made men speak with tongues. The work of the Holy Spirit, when he comforts men and makes them glad in Christ, is by no means second to the opening of the eyes of the blind.

And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.

We fear some congregations might say, “We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” From many modern sermons would you know that there was a Holy Spirit? If it were not for the benediction or the doxology you might go in and out many churches and meeting-houses by the year together, and scarcely know that there was such a person as that blessed, blessed giver of all good, the Holy Ghost. Sometimes we hear a little about his influences, as if the Holy Spirit were not as truly a person as even Jesus Christ himself, who in flesh and blood trod this earth.

3-7. *And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John’s baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve.*

When Paul first came there, there were a few persons that received him gladly. I suppose the Apostle went down into the Jews’ quarter, for in all these cities there was a Jews’ quarter, and he began to enquire a little and look about him, and he soon found there were some John the Baptistites there—about twelve. So he began with them. They were prepared ground, well ploughed, ready for the seed; so he instructed them a little further in the faith, and they believed in the Lord Jesus, and were baptized, and became the nucleus, the first twelve with which to form a Christian church.

8, 9. *And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.*

But the Apostle found that there was a great deal of stony ground at Ephesus.

The people did not all receive him, though twelve men did, and I suppose some women with them. Generally, I find more women receiving the gospel than men; so I suppose he gathered at least four and twenty who had known John the Baptist and his preachers. But the rest of the people were not after this fashion. Well, brethren, why should they be? Is the servant of Christ to expect to find all men willing to receive him? They rejected Christ; shall they revive us? If the work which our Master sent us upon were all easy, where were the honor of it? He gives easy work to those who are weak, but if he endows us with his own power, of course he will give us difficulties to overcome. We must not, therefore, flinch because we are rejected by many, but just buckle on our harness and ask fresh strength from God, and give ourselves to the work. Paul went down to the synagogue, and the Jews allowed him to speak too. After he had spoken, they began to dispute. He answered their questions; he persuaded them; and it appears that a great number of them, after hearing his answers to their difficulties, and listening to his solemn persuasive appeals, were led to believe that Jesus was the Christ, and trust in him, and so were saved.

But it appears that there was a third class among those to whom Paul ministered, who, after all that he could say, were hardened. He gave them clear proof that Jesus was the Christ, and he urged them to repent of sin. He persuaded them to believe in Jesus, but they were hardened the more by it, and they proved their hardness by this, that they spake evil concerning this way. Mostly when men will not submit to Christ, they try to find some fault. Perhaps they will slander the preacher, or the people of God, or they will misrepresent the gospel, or they will catch up certain phrases and words, and twist them, misrepresent them. Common enough, we grieve to say, is this among graceless hearers. What they will not receive themselves they rail at. They are like the dog in the manger; they cannot eat the hay, but they lie there and bark. They won’t enter the kingdom of heaven, and those who would enter they hinder them if they possibly can. Even when they see the power of the gospel upon others, they will turn it to ridicule. They wonder at the change that is wrought, but they are filled with wrath against it, and will not submit to Christ. However, brethren, though there will always be such as these, we are not to be cast down about it, for if we are ever able to say, as Paul was, “I am pure from the blood of all men,” it will be no small thing to be able to say it, even if great numbers should reject the teaching which we present to them.

10-13. *And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they*

which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.

There were certain tramping vagabonds who came into Ephesus trying to deceive the people, and pretending to heal by magic, and they knew about the gospel. How? I am sure they did, because they said, "This name of Jesus is a very great name, and seems to have great power; we will try and conjure by it." This was a villainous thing to do, yet it showed that the gospel had got at them and reached them.

14-16. *And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.*

If the Holy Ghost be not with you, you are like Jannes and Jambres, attempting to work a miracle without Jehovah's aid; and you will be baffled, and detected for an impostor. You will fail, like the seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, who tried to cast out devils: the devils do not know you; they would know Jesus; they would know the Holy Spirit; but at your idle efforts they mockingly laugh. Only those people who never do any spiritual work talk about what they can accomplish. When you get into the sacred service, you find how great your weakness is; you feel out of your depth when you come to deal with souls, and you must have the Holy Spirit or fail.

17-20. *And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts*

brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Ephesus was very much given to sorcery. There were certain things called Ephesian letters, supposed to possess great magical power, sold at Ephesus. There are many stories which every reader of classic history knows, such as that of a wrestler who always used to win the day because he wore round his neck one of these charms—all lying stories, but they were freely believed. Most of the Ephesians believed that the letters written round the base of Diana possessed potent charms. Now Paul, though he was not preaching about this, was preaching the gospel; yet the gospel found out this particular sin, and hit the nail on the head.

By Paul's preaching, and through the providence of God, the people at Ephesus began to be convinced that the use of magic was a wicked and disgraceful thing, and many of them came forward and confessed that they had been guilty of it. They confessed it to the preacher; they confessed it to the Church; they confessed it to the hearers; and when they had done this they proved the honesty of their confession, for they brought out all their charms and magic books, and made a great fire of them all. Why did not they sell them to somebody? They were worth so much money. Yes, but if they sold them they would have done mischief to somebody else, and the best thing was to destroy these vipers by burning them in the fire. Moreover, they showed their hatred of sin by burning the books, as they could not have done in any other way. And yet again, the burning of these books was a mighty sermon to everybody who saw it.

"What is this you are burning? Why, that book is worth fifty pounds!" "Oh! it is a magic book, and we have done with it. The child of God has nothing to do with such things, so we have burnt them." That was a better sermon than even Paul himself could have preached upon this subject. Look at the loss the people sustained. I daresay many of them were poor. Two thousand pounds in those days was a much larger sum than it is now, but they lost it all cheerfully to get rid of the obnoxious books, which once they had treasured in their houses. This is a triumph of the gospel when men give up what they prize, and when men are willing to suffer great loss in order to get rid of great sin.

21-27. *After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit,*

when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

Now in Ephesus there was a goddess called Diana. I have seen the thing at Rome. It is ugly enough, certainly, for anybody to worship. It is a female figure with a countless number of breasts, intended to signify the bounties of nature which she supplies to multitudes of men and beasts. Ugly and ill-formed, it was greatly worshipped at Ephesus. It was set in a niche in a temple, and generally covered with a curtain. This was drawn aside for worshippers, and on particular festival days people came to Ephesus from all parts of the world, and very seldom did one of them go home without taking with him a small image of Diana. Some of them were made of wood for the poorer sort, but many were made of metal—copper, brass, silver, and gold.

Well, when Paul was preaching there during the third year there was a time when the great festivals were held. Ephesus was not anything like so full as it had been —it might have been almost as full, but there were not so many at the temple, and somehow the shops hadn’t sold the shrines so readily—had not sold anything like the usual quantity; and one great mall had a factory and made many shrines, and he called his workmen together and said, “Do you know, this year we have not sold as much as we did last year by 50 per cent? The fact is, you’ll all be out of work. I can’t keep you on full time. I can’t sell the goods. Our trade is going to the dogs, and it is all through that fellow Paul. He has been here

three years now, and he has turned the people to worship the invisible God, and they won't worship Diana."

28, 29. *And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.*

Well, these workmen did not consider whether it was right or wrong, but it touched their pockets, and that is often a very powerful place in which to touch a man. They thought they might not have such good wages by-and-bye, so they rushed home and told other workmen that belonged to kindred trades, and then Demetrius came in and told them that Diana was being put aside by this Paul, who preached and turned away much people, and there was a great row, and they rushed to the theater

30, 31. *And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.*

Paul, like the little hero that he was, wanted to go right into the great ampitheatre to address them, but some of his friends said, "No, no; you mustn't do that! They'll tear you to pieces." Our brave little man felt that he should like to go and preach to them. He wanted to get a chance if he could of speaking the Word of God. There they were, all on stone seats, tier on tier—a great mass—much, I suppose, like the Coliseum at Rome, and he thought he must go in and talk to them. But it is said that "certain of the chief of Asia which were his friends" prevented his going in. The disciples would not, perhaps, have had influence with him, but these were men of rank and ability, who said, "We are not Christians, but we respect you, and we don't want to see you torn to pieces by that wild rabble. Don't go in"; and Paul did not go in. Now where souls are saved, if the gospel be truly preached, it will always have a great many friends, and these will, perhaps, serve a great turn at a pinch and in times of difficulty, and I am not sure but what these "chief of Asia" may, after all, some of them

have become Christians, for if a man does not want to be a Christian it is a very dangerous thing to be friendly to Christ, when you come to mix up with God's people, and help them, and befriend them. It often happens that the Lord, in return for a cup of cold water that is given to a prophet in the name of the Lord, gives the promised reward; and he that was but a friend becomes at last kith and kin with us and joins us.

32-37. *Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And when the town clerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.*

I daresay Paul, in his preaching, made the remark that God was not like unto images of silver and gold of man's making, but Paul never abused Diana. How do I know that? He never did, for the Town Clerk in the theater said, "These men are not robbers of churches, neither are they blasphemers of your goddess." Paul had just uttered the general doctrine that idolatry was a great sin; he had not poured out a great torrent of abuse on Diana and all the rest.

38-41. *Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar,*

there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

Paul's life was greatly in jeopardy, so that he writes, "We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life." The apostle attributes to God alone his singular preservation; and if he referred also to the occasion when he was stoned and left for dead, there is much appropriateness in his blessing "God which raised the dead."

Acts 20

1-9. *And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, and there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. These going before tarried for us at Troas. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.*

Under Paul's preaching Eutychus went to sleep, and Paul never blamed him. He died as the result of it, but he got raised again from the dead, so I suppose there was no fault in him. We may sometimes, without any wilfulness on our part, as a necessary result of the weakness of our nature, or the stress of our toil and care, have brought ourselves into a condition in which we cannot feel like the chariots of Amminadib, and it is no use for us to attempt it. The body does affect the soul materially; and a thousand outside agencies will tell upon our mental

susceptibilities.

10-12. *And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.*

Paul came down and prayed, and Eutychus was restored to life. But did Eutychus get up and preach after he had come from the dead? No; the thought never seems to have struck a single person in the assembly. Paul went on with his sermon, and they sat and listened to him, and did not care one fig about what Eutychus had seen; for Eutychus had nothing more to tell them than Paul had. Of all the number of those who by divine might have been brought again from the shades of death, I repeat the assertion, we have not one secret told; we have not one mystery unravelled by them all. Now, God knoweth best; we will not compare our surmises to divine decision. If God decided that resurrection men should be silent, it was best it should be; their testimony would have been of little worth or help to us, or else it would have been borne.

13-17. *And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost. And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.*

There were many elders, and I suppose the elders were in proportion to the people, so that there was a very large church gathered there. This is delightful fruit, to find men made believers—willing to be baptized on profession of their faith, and then formed into Christian churches. Paul had not labored in vain, for

he had lit such a lamp in Ephesus as should not soon be put out.

18, 18. *And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:*

It is not often that a man may safely speak about his own humility. Humble men are mostly conscious of great pride, while those who are boastful of humility have nothing but false pretense, and really lack and want it. I question whether any of us are at all judges as to our pride or humility; for verily, pride so often assumes the shape of lowliness when it hath its own end to serve, and lowliness on the other hand is so perfectly compatible with a heavenly dignity of decision, that it is not easy at all times to discover which is the counterfeit and which is the precious and genuine coin. You will remember that in the case in our text, Paul speaks by inspiration. If it were not for this fact, I would not have believed even Paul himself when he spoke of his own humility. So distrustful do I feel of our judgment upon this point, that if he had not spoken under the infallible witness and guidance of the Holy Spirit, I should have said that the text was not true, and that when a man should say he served God with humbleness of mind, speaking merely from his own judgment, there was clear proof before you that he was a proud man. But Paul speaketh not to his own commendation, but with the sole motive of clearing his hands of the blood of all men. Led no doubt by the Holy Ghost thus to speak—that he might be an example to all coming ages—he becomes the mirror to all the ministers of Christ, that we too, each of us in our degree serving the Lord, may without degree be filled with humility, taking the lowest seat, not esteeming ourselves beyond what we ought to think, but submitting ourselves to men of low estate; emptying out ourselves as he did who emptied himself of all his glory, when he came to save our souls.

20. *And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,*

It is a great comfort in feeling if you are called to present the gospel that as far as

you know, you have preached it and have kept back nothing that God has taught to you. It will be a thousand mercies if any one of God's servants shall be found clear at the last. When we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, we have only done what it was our duty to do; but still there is a sweet peace about fidelity when in the integrity of one's heart we can say that we have not refrained our lips as God knows.

21. *Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This was the practical drift of Paul's teaching at Ephesus, and everywhere else. He kept back nothing which was profitable to them; and the main profit he expected them to derive from his teaching the whole counsel of God was this, that they should have "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." This was the great aim of the apostle. I pray that it may be so with all of us who are teachers of the Word: may we never be satisfied if we interest, please, or dazzle; but may we long for the immediate production, by the Spirit of God, of true repentance and faith.

Paul testified concerning "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"; by which I understand that, as an ambassador for Christ, he assured the people that through repentance and faith they would receive salvation. He taught in God's name mercy through the atoning sacrifice to all who would quit their sin and follow the Lord Jesus. With many tears he added his own personal testimony to his official statement. He could truly say, "I have repented, and I do repent"; and he could add, "but I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior; I am resting upon the one foundation, trusting alone in the Crucified." His official testimony, with its solemnity, and his personal testimony, with its pathetic earnestness, made up a very weighty witness-bearing on the behalf of these two points—repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

22-24. *And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry,*

which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

Paul's leave-taking of the elders irresistibly reminds me of the old historian's record of Epaminondas the Theban general who, when he was mortally wounded by a Spartan spear, the head of which remained in his flesh, bade his friends leave it alone a little, "for" said he, "I have lived long enough if I die unconquered;" and when they told him that the battle was won, and that his comrades were victorious, he bade them draw out the head of the spear, that his life might end. One observed to him that he had fallen but that he had not lost his shield, and that the victory was won; to which he replied with his last breath, "Your Epaminondas thus dying doth not die." So Paul has lived long enough if the gospel is prospering in its course, and though he lays down his life he does not die if his ministry is fulfilled.

25, 26. *And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.*

When Paul was parting from his Ephesian friends, who had come to bid him farewell at Miletus, he did not request of them a commendation of his ability; he did not request of them a recommendation for his fervid eloquence, his profound learning, his comprehensive thought, or his penetrating judgment. He knew right well that he might have credit for all these, and yet be found a castaway at last. He required a witness which would be valid in the court of heaven, and of value in a dying hour. His one most solemn adjuration is: "I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." In the apostle this utterance was no egotism; it was a fact that he had, without courting the smiles or fearing the frowns of any, preached the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, as it had been taught to him by the Holy Spirit, and as he had received it in his own heart. O that all ministers of Christ could honestly challenge the like witness!

27. *For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*

By which I think we are to understand that he had given to his people the entire

gospel. He had not dwelt upon some one doctrine of it, to the exclusion of the rest; but it had been his honest endeavor to bring out every truth according to the analogy of faith. He had not magnified one doctrine into a mountain, and then diminished another into a molehill; but he had endeavored to present all blended together, like the colors in the rainbow, as one harmonious and glorious whole.

Of course, he did not claim for himself any infallibility as a man, although as an inspired man he was without error in his writings. He had, doubtless, sins to confess in private, and faults to bemoan God. He had, doubtless, sometimes failed to put a truth as clearly as he could have wished, when preaching the Word; he had not always been earnest as he could desire; but at least he could claim this, that he had not wilfully kept back a single part of the truth as it is in Jesus.

Of the apostle Paul we think it may be truly said, that no sinner missed a comfort from his keeping back Christ's cross; that no saint was bewildered in spirit from his denying the bread of heaven and withholding precious truth; that no practical Christian became so practical as to become legal, and no doctrinal Christian became so doctrinal as to become unpractical. His preaching was of so savory and consistent a kind, that they who heard him, being blessed of the Spirit, became Christians indeed, both in life and spirit, reflecting the image of their Master.

28. *Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

Fishing is not all, as many seem to think. It is a great part of our service, and would God it were more attended to; but after it has been attended to shepherding comes in, and is a work of equal weight. Our Lord Jesus Christ would have his servants attend to this second task with all their hearts. If souls are converted they have been brought up from the depths of sin, and the scene changes: we see a flock, "the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood," This flock needs as much care as any other, yea, it needs to be tended with the utmost labor and watchfulness.

The Lord Jesus himself is the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep, the Great Shepherd who is brought again from the dead, and the Chief

Shepherd under whom he has appointed shepherds to watch for the souls of men. He will have those of us whom he calls to his service to shepherdize those who are converted: leading, protecting, feeding, comforting, and succouring them, He will call us to account if we neglect this charge, for he will require his flock at our hands, saying, “Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?”

29-31. *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.*

He was a man so whole hearted and intense in all that he did, that we ought to remember not merely the amount of his labors, but the way in which he wore out himself by the intensity of his zeal in them. Probably never man led a more intensely ardent life than be. Moreover, added to all this, he carried a weight of care enough to crush him; for there came upon him the care of all the churches—to plant them, to defend them against rising errors, to prevent schisms from dividing the flock, to lead in the converts from grace to grace, to instruct them, and to present every one perfect before God. The burden resting upon the apostle was greater than the cares of all empire; and then, as if to complete the whole, he was called to suffer persecutions of which he has given us a list, which as we read it makes us shudder that one man should have endured so much, and makes us also glory in humanity that it should be possible that so much should be borne and done for God by a single individual.

32-34. *And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. I have coveted no man’s silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.*

Paul carried his needle and thread with him wherever he went, for everybody had a tent is those days, and he was ready for work at any moment either upon small family tents, or tents to cover a great assembly. When he had finished

preaching, he could turn to tent-mending, and so earn his own living, and preach the gospel freely. Paul did not make his preaching a stalking-horse to his trade, but he made his handicraft a pack-horse to his ministry, so that he could say, "These hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me."

35. *I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

Ask any man who has been to visit the sick, the poor, and the needy, whether he has not come home more resigned to his own trials, and more satisfied with his own lot. We gave a shilling, and received a casket of pearls, which dropped from the lips of the poor suffering-one while he told of God's faithfulness, and the preciousness of the love of Christ. We are great losers when we know not these rich poor saints. If we would but trade with them 'twere a blessed barter for us. Coral and pearl—let no mention be made of them in comparison with the priceless gems which we might receive if we had greater sympathy and fuller communion with the suffering sons and daughters of Jerusalem

36-38. *And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.*

Paul's heroism, so far as man was concerned, was self-contained, deliberate, and as sure to display itself in the solitude of a dungeon as in the assembly of the faithful. He was parting with his weeping friends, and going forward to trials of unknown intensity, but he was altogether unmoved by fear, and advanced on his way without a question.

Acts 21

Spurgeon never preached or commented upon this chapter.

Acts 22

Spurgeon never preached or commented upon this chapter.

Acts 23

1-5. *And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.*

This smiting while under trial is peculiarly atrocious. To strike a man while he is pleading in his own defense, would surely be a violation of the laws even of barbarians. It brought Paul's blood into his face, and made him lose his balance when the high priest ordered them to smite him on the mouth. I think I hear his words of burning indignation: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?"

Bravo, Paul, that is speaking up for yourself! We cannot blame thee, for who are we to censure an apostle? But look at Paul's Master and hear his words, "If I have spoken evil bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" Is not the example of Jesus the more noble, the more Godlike? No man for a moment can put the two side by side without feeling that the Lord's conduct is by far the more sublime. It is not for us to imitate the servant of Christ when Christ himself excels him.

6-10. *But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I*

am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

In this manner Paul created a dissension among the conclave, which for a time wrought in his favor. Paul had been in a great tumult, and had been roughly rescued from the wrath of the people by the chief captain, who saw that otherwise he would be pulled in pieces. Paul was like the rest of us, made of flesh and blood, and therefore liable to be cast down: he had kept himself calm at first; but, still, the strong excitement of the day had no doubt operated upon his mind, and when he was lying in prison all alone, thinking upon the perils that surrounded him, he needed good cheer, and he received it. The bravest man may find his spirit sinking after the battle, and so perhaps it was with the apostle.

11. *And the night following the Lord stood by him,*

If all else forsook him, Jesus was company enough; if all others despised him, the smile of Jesus was patronage enough; if the good cause seemed in danger, in the presence of his Master victory was sure. The Lord, who had stood for him at the cross, now stood by him in the prison; the Lord, who had called to him out of heaven, who had washed him in his blood, who had commissioned him to be his servant, who had sustained him in labors and trials oft, now visited him in his solitary cell. It was a dungeon, but the Lord was there; it was dark, but the glory of the Lord lit it up with heaven's own splendor.

The Lord stood by Paul despite doors and locks, he asked no warder's leave to enter, nor did he stir bolt or bar, but there he was, the Companion of his humble

servant. The Lord can visit his chosen when nobody else could be allowed to do so, because of contagion, or from fear of exciting the fevered brain. If we come into such a peculiar position that no earthly friend knows our experience, none having been tempted as we are, yet the Lord Jesus can enter into our special trial, and sympathize in our peculiar grief. Jesus can stand side by side with us, for he has been afflicted in all our afflictions.

and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem,

We dare not look for much joy in anything that we have done, for our poor works are all imperfect; and yet the Lord sometimes gives his servants honey in the carcasses of lions which they have themselves slain, by pouring into their souls a sweet sense of having walked in integrity before him. Before the great day of reward, the Lord whispers into the ear, "Well done, good and faithful servant;" or he says openly before all men, "She hath done what she could." Herein is good cheer, for if the Lord accepts, it is a small matter if men condemn. The Lord says to Paul, "Thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem." The apostle had done so, but he was too humble to console himself with that fact till his Lord gave him leave to do so by acknowledging the brave deed.

so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

The Lord would have us take comfort from the prospect of future service and usefulness. We are not done with yet, and thrown aside as vessels in which the Lord hath no more pleasure. This is the chief point of comfort in our Lord's word to the apostle. Be of good courage, there is more for you to do, Paul; they cannot kill you at Jerusalem, for you must bear witness also at Rome. Brace yourself up, O weary, working brother, for your day's work is not over yet, and your sun cannot go down till, like Joshua, you have finished your conflict with Amalek. The old saying is true, "You are immortal till your work is done." Possibly not one half of your work is even begun, and therefore you will rise again from sickness, you will soar above depression, and you will do more for the Lord than ever.

12-15. *And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and*

bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

Paul was not aware of the danger to which he was exposed, he did not know that certain Jews, to the number of forty, had banded themselves together to kill him; but he who was his shield and his exceeding great reward had heard the cruel oath, and arranged to disappoint the bloodthirsty ones.

The Lord knows all about your troubles before they come to you; he anticipates them by his tender foresight. Before Satan can draw the bow, the Preserver of men will put his beloved beyond, the reach of the arrow. Before the weapon is forged in the furnace, and fashioned on the anvil, he knows how to provide us with armor of proof which shall burn the edge of the sword and break the point of the spear. Let us therefore sing with holy boldness, “In the time of trouble he shall hide me in, his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.” How safe we are, for Jehovah hath said, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn.”

16-24. *And when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? And he said, The Jews have agreed to*

desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me. And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

Felix was originally a slave; he was freed by Claudius, and became one of the infamous favourites of the emperor. Of course in that capacity he pandered to his master's vices, and was at all times prepared to indulge the Emperor in every lustful wish of his abominable heart. Through this he became promoted, and ran through the stages of Roman preferment, until he obtained the Governorship of Judea. Whilst he was Governor there, he committed every act of extortion which it was possible for him to commit, and went so far at last, that the Emperor Nero was obliged to recall him, and he would have been severely punished for his crimes, had it not been for the influence of his brother Pallas, another freed man, with the Emperor, through whom he obtained a release, after a sharp rebuke. The Roman historian, Tacitus, says, "He exercised, in Judea, the imperial functions with a mercenary soul."

25-35. *And he wrote a letter after this manner: Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. And when it was told me how that*

the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

How mighty must that gospel be, which, when it gained an entrance into the heart of Paul, could never be driven out of it! For it he suffered the loss of all things, and as for them, he counted them but dung, that he might win Christ. To spread the truth, he encountered hardships, shipwrecks, perils on the land, and perils by sea; but none of these things moved him, neither did he count his life dear unto him, that he might win Christ and be found in him. Persecution followed persecution; of the Jews was he beaten with rods; he was dragged from one tribunal to another; scarce in any city did he find anything but bonds and imprisonment awaiting him. Attacked in his own country—he is accused at Jerusalem, and arraigned at Cesarea; he is taken from one tribunal to another to be tried for his life.

Acts 24

1-5. *And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:*

Nazarene is not at all the same word as Nazarite. It is a different word in the Hebrew, and you must not confound the two. Never suppose that when You say, “He shall be called a Nazarene,” that it signifies that he was called a Nazarite. Nazarite among the Jews would have been a title of honor, but Nazarene is simply a name of contempt.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was never ashamed of this name: in fact, he called himself “Jesus of Nazareth” after he had risen from the dead. He told Paul when he smote him to the earth, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest.”

Christ’s followers have been known as the sect of the Nazarenes—that is to say, they must expect to bear a measure of the indignities poured upon their leader. The fact is that the ungodly revile those who are true to the Lord Jesus. Well, when they do, there is nothing in that to be ashamed of. What if I believe the truth! shall I be ashamed of it? What if I fear God! shall I be ashamed of it? Let those be ashamed who do not fear him. What if I believe in prayer! What if I

receive answers to prayer! Shall I blush about that? Let those blush to scarlet who never pray, or have no God to hear their prayers. Shall I be ashamed because I try to do what is right, and have a conscience before God, and cannot enjoy loose pleasures, or listen to lascivious song? Shall I be ashamed of chastity and truth? Why then let angels be ashamed of purity; let the stars be ashamed of light; let the sun be ashamed of day. There is nothing to be ashamed of in things honorable and of good repute.

6-15. *Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so. Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*

To think that there is a resurrection and another life! What! Were it worth our while to toil here in the service of Christ, often unrewarded and very frequently misrepresented, and persecuted for what we do, if there were not a place where the reward of grace would be given, and where the mistakes of earth would all be set right? “Therefore,” says the Apostle, “beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” It might be in vain here, but

forasmuch as there is a resurrection your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The same thing is an encouragement under suffering. For this the martyrs cheerfully gave themselves up to their tormentors, not accepting deliverance, because they looked for a better resurrection. This it was that made them brave to meet the lions in the amphitheater, or to lie and silently rot in the dismal dungeons of the Roman Emperors. This it was that made Smithfield glorious, as the saints in their chariots of fire clapped their hands and ascended to the skies. They were, of all men, most miserable if, in this life, only they had hope. They were, of all men, most insane to fling away their lives if this world were all: but because there is another and a better land, to die for Jesus became a glorious thing, and they did it, being not amazed, trembling not, but dying with greater grandeur about them, than that with which most men have learned to surround their living. And now, you that today are poor, or today are scoffed at; you who, though trying to follow Christ, find it a hard path; you who at home have little to encourage you and comfort you—recollect this is not your rest. If you were to have fifty years of your present trouble, well, it will be as nothing compared with the eternal weight of glory.

16-21. *And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.*

Mark how Paul always maintains the prominent passion of his soul. Put him where you may, he seems to be like John Bunyan, who says, “If you let me out of prison today, I will preach the gospel again tomorrow, by the grace of God.” Nay, more than that, he preached it in prison, before his judges he proclaimed it. Standing up before the Sanhedrin, he cries, “As touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question.”

22-25. *And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,*

Here you have a judge extremely willing to put the prisoner to death, because he desired to please the Jews; you have, on the other hand, a prisoner unabashed, who comes before the judge, and without any debate, begins to unfold the gospel.

Felix had been an unjust extortioner, and the apostle purposely selected righteousness to be a topic of his discourse. By the side of Felix sat Drusilla; in the verse preceding our text she is called his wife. It is said she was a Jewess. This Drusilla, was a daughter of Herod Agrippa, the great—a woman noted in that age for her superlative charms, and for her unbridled voluptuousness. She had been once affianced to Antiochus, who, upon the death of Herod refused to marry her. She was afterwards married to Azizus, the king of the Amesenes, who, although a heathen, was so fond of her that he submitted to the most rigorous rites of the Jewish religion in order to obtain her in marriage. His love was but ill-requited, for in a little time she deserted him at the instigation of Felix, and was, at the time of Paul's address, living as the wife of the lascivious Felix. We may easily understand then, why the apostle Paul, fixing his stern eye on Drusilla, reasoned concerning continence, and publicly rebuked both Felix and Drusilla for the shameless lust in which they were publicly living. And then you may imagine since there was now a court sitting, and Felix himself was the judge, and Paul the prisoner, how strikingly appropriate was the last theme —"judgment to come."

Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

Paul petrified him, nailed him to his seat, opened his ears, and made them listen, while with stern and impassioned earnestness, though his hands were bound with chains, he used the liberty of the gospel in upbraiding him. Well do I conceive that then Felix began to tremble. He that had been base, and mean, and perfidious, trembled like a coward slave, as he really was; and though sitting on a throne he pictured himself already damned. What he next would have done we cannot tell, if the devil had not then suggested to him that it was time to rise; for in hot haste he and Drusilla left the throne.

Felix said there would be a more convenient season, and then he would again send for Paul, that he might hear him seriously. And many a sinner thinks that just now it is not easy to turn and to repent, but that by-and-bye it will be. Now, is not that a very string of falsehoods? In the first place, is it ever easy for a sinner to turn to God? Must not that be done, at any time, by divine power? And again, if that be not easy for him now, how will it be easier in after life? Will not his sins bind fresh fetters to his soul, so that it will be even more impossible for him to escape from his iron bondage? If he be dead now, will he not be corrupt before he reaches tomorrow? And when tomorrow comes, to which he looks forward as being easier for a resurrection, will not his soul be yet more corrupt, and, therefore, if we may so speak, even further from the possibility of being raised?

26, 27. *He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.*

Porcius Festus had been appointed governor in the place of Felix, who had left Paul a prisoner so as to please the Jews, though he would have been willing enough to release him it Paul or his friends would have given him a sufficiently heavy bribe. He had trembled as Paul had "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," but his conscience had not been so quickened as to make him act justly towards the apostle. Yet his unrighteous conduct was made to serve the Lord's purpose, which was that Paul should testify before one earthly ruler after another until he should ultimately appear before the cruel Nero himself at Rome. Paul was at Caesarea, but he was not at

once brought before Festus; and when the governor went up to Jerusalem, the apostle’s enemies renewed their plotting against him

Acts 25

1-3. *Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Ceasarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, and desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.*

They had been foiled in their previous attempt to assassinate the apostle but their malice led them to try again to put him to death in that dastardly fashion.

4, 5. *But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesaria and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.*

Whether Festus suspected their real reason for being so anxious for him to send for Paul, we cannot tell; but, at any rate, their scheme was once more a failure.

6, 7. *And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea, and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.*

It was easy for them to lay many and grievous complaints against Paul, yet it was not only difficult but impossible for them to prove their charge against the apostle.

Paul's opponents fought with the weapons of "certain questions," and on the other hand he defended himself with a bold affirmation. This is the old story of speculation against dogmatism. It is always the way: the adversaries of the cross of Christ assert nothing, but they question everything. They will not lay down a basis, nor define their opinions. If they would do this, we might soon demolish their fabrics of falsehood; but all that they propound is "certain questions." On the other hand, those who are witnesses for the Lord Jesus have little care about questions, speculations, and the boasted outcome of cultured thought; but they affirm certain definite facts: they affirm these to be a revelation from God, and there they stand.

8-11. *While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all. But Festus, willing to do the Jew's pleasure*

In that respect he was just line his predecessor, Felix. No doubt he took into account the number and position of Paul's accusers, and thought it would be the wiser policy to side with them rather than with the prisoner; and, therefore, "Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure,"—

answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.

As a freeborn Roman citizen, he had the right of appeal to the emperor, and that right he exercised, it may be that he also realized that this was the way in which the Lord's prophecy should be fulfilled: "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at home."

12. *Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.*

The die was cast, there was no need to argue the matter any further.

13–16. *And after certain days King Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's' cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: about whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.*

Festus is giving to King Agrippa a brief account of the matter between Paul and the Jews. It may not be a very accurate account; for Festus did not profess to understand the business. He was a Roman governor newly come to Judaea; he had no acquaintance whatever with Jewish Scriptures nor with Jewish laws; he is, therefore, merely giving to King Agrippa a rough and ready outline of the affair as it struck him. He had never thought it worth his special attention, but he was a little puzzled how he should represent the matter to Caesar, to whom Paul had appealed.

Festus must have felt profound contempt for the chief priests and elders of the Jews who clamoured for Paul's death even before he had been tried, and he gave them plainly to understand that this was not the Roman if it was the Jewish method of dealing with accused persons.

17–19. *Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.*

Festus may have supposed that they would have accused Paul of plotting against Rome, or of some other political crime. He would have thought such matters of

far greater importance than the “certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”

Festus is represented by our translators as calling the Jewish religion a “superstition.” I hardly think he would have used so harsh a term before Agrippa, who professed to be of the Jewish faith. But yet, as he probably knew that Agrippa’s religion did not lie very deep, and was the mere appendage of a man of fashion, Festus was not very particular about the word which he used; and he lighted upon one which may mean “superstition” as the Authorized Version has it, or “religion” as the Revised Version has it. “Well, well,” he seems to say to Agrippa, “I do not know much about it. I supposed, when the Jews brought this man before me, that he would be charged with a breach of the Roman law, and I was prepared, of course, to deal with the prisoner; but when I listened to their accusation, and found that there was nothing in it but some disputes about their religion, I hardly knew what to say. Their controversy is important to them, I dare say; but it can be of no consequence either to you or to me, for it turned very much upon a person of the name of Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”

Paul could make that affirmation with the utmost confidence, for Christ had appeared to him on the road to Damascus, proving without doubt that, though once dead, he was again alive.

20–22. *And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar. Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.*

So Paul’s witness-bearing was made to spread still further. It is scarcely possible to conceive of any other circumstances in which the gospel could have been made known to such an audience as the apostle was, on the morrow, to have the opportunity of addressing.

23. *And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief*

captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

It was such a congregation as Paul was only too glad to address, and the gospel could not have had a nobler or worthier advocate, yet we do not read of anyone who was present yielding up himself or herself to the Lord Jesus Christ.

24. *And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.*

Festus took care that the Jews should not be able to forget that they had demanded the death of a man who had not even been put upon his trial.

25–27. *But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O King Agrippa, that after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.*

The governor talked like a man of sense, and he even went so far as to say that the prisoner before him "had committed nothing worthy of death."

Acts 26

1. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:*

I do not suppose Agrippa imagined that Paul would take all the liberty that he did; but inasmuch as the king had said to him, “Thou art permitted to speak for thyself,” Paul, who, even when he was permitted to speak for himself, did not forget that he was the servant of God, and used that liberty as the servant of God, and so took the opportunity to seek to impress the truth upon the conscience and heart of the king.

Notwithstanding his bonds, Paul is to be envied that he had an opportunity of addressing himself to kings and rulers, and that once at least in his life he stood before the great master of the Roman world, the Emperor himself. To reach the ignorant who sit on thrones is no mean feat for benevolence. Alas I the gospel seldom climbs the high places of rank and dignity. It is a great act of mercy towards nobles and princes, when they have the opportunity of hearing a faithful gospel discourse. Highly favored was Edward VI. to have such a preacher as Hugh Latimer, to tell him to his face the truth as it is in Jesus; and much favored was Agrippa, though he scarcely appreciated the privilege, to listen to so earnest an advocate of the gospel of Jesus as Paul the apostle.

2, 3. *I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.*

It is always well to try to be on good terms with the person whom you wish to

impress with the truth of the gospel. Paul therefore did not begin bluntly, as some foolish people would have done, but he addressed the king most courteously and respectfully. I think I see the little man, as he doubtless was, Paulus the man with feeble eyes, and with no great bodily presence to command attention, yet bravely stretching out his hand, and, like a preacher, thus addressing Herod Agrippa:

4–7. *My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews, which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.*

The Jews still had hope concerning the promise of the Messiah, and all the promises in God's covenant with them; and Paul says that for the sake of this hope he had been led to do that which had now brought him as a prisoner before the king.

Notice that the fiction concerning "the ten lost tribes" has no foundation in Scripture. There are no lost tribes, several of them are mentioned by name in the New Testament; the apostle James writes "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad," and here Paul speaks of them as "our twelve tribes."

The Jews whom we have among us at this day belong to all of the twelve tribes, as they will tell you if you ask them. There are no lost tribes yet to be discovered, neither are we, as a nation, those ten tribes that are supposed to have been lost. We are Gentiles, and not Jews. The apostle speaks here concerning the hope of the whole nation of the Jews. We who have believed in Jesus are the inheritors of that grand hope, as we have understood it aright, and have realized that it is fulfilled in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the only-begotten Son of God.

8. *Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God*

should raise the dead?

That great fact of the resurrection of Christ is the corner-stone of the temple of truth, the key-stone of the arch of the gospel. The apostles made this truth very prominent in their preaching, and here Paul began his address with it. It was the great difficulty of the Christian religion at that period, so Paul went straight to it at once.

9, 10. *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem:*

For Paul was the kind of man who, if he thought he ought to do anything, he always did it. Even in his unregenerate state, his conscience, unenlightened as it was, swayed him; but now, with an enlightened conscience, he looked back upon that part of his life with deep regret, and he did not fail to acknowledge and mourn the wrong that he had ignorantly done to the Lord Jesus Christ and his faithful followers.

10, 11. *And many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*

Paul was a whole-hearted man; whatever he did, he did intensely; so that, when he did wrong, he did it with a kind of madness. Such a furious hatred of Jesus of Nazareth was upon him that all Judaea was not large enough for the indulgence of his persecuting malice against the saints, so he “persecuted them even unto strange cities.” He regarded the Christians as a pestilent sect, and, therefore, he hunted them down. He abhorred the name of Jesus of Nazareth as that of an imposter, and, therefore, he determined that no stone should be left unturned to overthrow his power.

12–14. *Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and*

commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

Not “It is hard for me to bear it,” but “It is hard for thee”; as if, though conscious of being persecuted, our Lord, in that divine unselfishness which is so natural to him, forgot the kicks that were given to him, and only thought of the injury which Saul was doing to himself, when, like an ox that strikes out against the goad, he injured himself.

15, 16. *And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet:*

As much as to say—“Thou art forgiven, thou art chosen, thou art beloved: therefore lie no longer prostrate, overwhelmed with fear. Give not way to despondency. Resign thyself into my hands, and be prepared with activity and diligence to spend all the rest of thy life in doing good. Arise, stand on thy feet, for work is to be done at once which will need all thy courage and might!” Men can hardly be very useful till they cease to be despondent, diffident, and depressed, and become energetic and hopeful.

for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee,

Listen! The persecutor’s voice is changed into that of an enquiring disciple. He asks, “What wilt thou have me to do?” If angels sang with delight over a new-made world, their song must have been seven times as joyous over a new-made apostle. The change was miraculous. At this distance of time we can hardly appreciate it; but if we had been living in daily fear of our lives, if we had seen our father or our brother dragged off to death by this ferocious enemy of the cross, and then had suddenly heard that he was converted to the faith which he

opposed, we should have cried, “Incredible!” For the Ethiopian to change his skin, or for the leopard to lose his spots, would be little compared with this cruel Pharisee bowing himself in lowly penitence before the Lord Jesus whom he had persecuted.

17, 18. *Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles,*

Paul’s life was always in danger, and yet never in real peril, for the Lord was his keeper. He was daily delivered unto death, and yet he was immortal till his life-work was complete. They stoned him and supposed that he was dead; but he rose up and began to cheer the brethren. Till his time came and his work was wished the stormy sea could not drown him, the beasts of Ephesus could not devour him, the mob could not kill him, even sworn conspirators could not slay him. When he had finished his course, he submitted his neck to the headsman’s sword; but till that moment he was delivered out of the mouth of the lion, and guarded from perils of robbers, perils of rivers, and perils by false brethren. So shall every true servant of Christ be kept as with a garrison from all evil. We do not nowadays run risks of the kind which beset the apostle, but ours are more subtle and insinuating: yet the true servant of God shall be preserved from all evil.

unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes,

Men are born blind, and continue blind till by the power of Jesus sight is given to them. Opening the eye of the mind is not an operation which usually demands much time. In Paul’s case we read, “Immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.” The mind sees truth on a sudden, the aspect of everything is altered; and the man has obtained a new faculty.

and to turn them from darkness to light,

Much depends upon the direction in which a man’s face is turned. Here stands a blind man with his face to the darkness: if he goes forward he advances into blacker night; how needful then is that work of the blessed Spirit by which men are turned completely round, and their front is reversed! The darkness is now

behind the convert, and the light is on ahead, so that every step he takes he advances towards the light, which increases upon his vision as he nears it. He loves light, he seeks it, he sighs to get nearer and nearer to it: he runs towards it that he may read everything by its aid, and he turns away from darkness, which is now dreaded by him as an Egyptian plague. He has not received all the light he desires; but one thing he knows—whereas he was once blind he now sees. What a blessed turning is that which makes us face truth, and goodness, and God, and heaven; and leave ignorance, sin, and hell behind. The soul is brought into a new element: light is its life, in which alone it flourishes and bears fruit; darkness is its death in which it shivers, pines, and withers.

and from the power of Satan unto God,

As the soul is brought into a new element, so is it also brought under a new government. Translation has taken place: the man is translated from the power of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, or, as our text has it, "from the power of Satan unto God." Notice, the man is turned "from the power of Satan," the tyrannic dominion, and crushing grasp of the evil, cunning, malicious, hateful prince of fallen angels. Once he was hopelessly under that power, but now he has clean escaped from the slavery of the devil, and has come into the liberty of a child of God. To the Lord whom he had forgotten he has turned, so that he thinks of him, cares for him, trusts in him. His heart, his desire, his longing, his hope, all look toward his Savior; he longs to become more and more like his God, and to enjoy more and more the favor of the great Father. What a blessed turning this—from the power of Satan to the power of God! Happy are the men who are the means of converting their fellows in this fashion!

that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

When a man turns to God it is a proof that God has turned to him. When he hates his sins the Lord has put them away; as soon as ever he confesses and forsakes them they are blotted out for ever. The complete turning of his mind from darkness to light is a proof to the convert that God the righteous Judge has turned away his wrath from him. When the love of sin has gone the guilt of sin has gone also. Full conversion carries with it full pardon. The same moment that we receive Christ we "receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them

which are sanctified."

This text speaks of Paul being an instrument in the hands of God of opening men's eyes and turning them to God, that they may receive pardon, and so forth, in all which they seem to be passive: but in this later verse they are called upon to be active—"That they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." Paul was commanded to go and do such and such things in the power of the Spirit; but when he commenced to do them it was by telling men that they should repent. God gives repentance, but men must themselves repent.

19–23. *Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other thing than those which the prophet and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.*

Paul stuck to the Scriptures, and to the gospel revealed in them, and was not a teller-out of his own thoughts, and ideas, and notions; but he was a herald proclaiming what his King bade him say, and telling out what the grace of his Master made him only too glad to say.

24. *And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.*

No doubt many who saw the singular change in his conduct, and knew what he had given up and what he endured for his new faith, had come to the same conclusion. Paul would not be at all offended by this judgment, for he would remember that his Lord and Master had been charged with madness, and that even our Lord's relatives had said, "He is beside himself."

25. *But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the word of truth and soberness.*

He had been “mad” once, as he had just confessed; but he had recovered from that madness. Now how calmly he replies to the taunt of Festus; there is nothing of anger or resentment about his dignified answer, “I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”

26. *For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.*

This thing was not done in a corner: keep it not a secret. Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature

27. *King Agrippa, believest thou the prophet? I know that thou believest.*

Oh, but this is the way to preach! We must not only argue from the Scriptures, relate our experience, and give clear statements of gospel truth, but we must also carry the war into the heart. The minister of Christ must know how to take the scaling ladder, and fix it against the wall of the conscience, and climb it sword in hand, to meet the man face to face in sacred duel, for the capture of his heart, he must not flinch to tell the faults he knows, or deal with the errors he perceives. There must be a consecrated self-denial about the preacher, so that it matters not to him, even though he should draw down the wrath of his hearer upon his head; one thing he must aim at, that he may persuade him to be a Christian, and for this he must strike home, coming to close quarters, if perhaps by God’s grace, he may prick the man in his heart, slay his enmity, and bring him into captivity to Jesus.

28. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*

I do not recollect a single sermon from this text that is fairly upon the words as

they stand; they are all discourses upon being almost Christians, which, begging the pardon of the venerable divines, has nothing to do with the text, for the apostle never persuaded Agrippa to be almost a Christian; but he almost persuaded him to be a Christian altogether. Agrippa certainly never was an almost-Christian, his life and character displayed a spirit very far removed from that condition. A man who is almost an artist knows something of painting, but a man almost persuaded to be an artist may not even know the names of the colors.

29. *And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.*

In that parting word of goodwill he unveiled the desire of his heart; he sought not release from his chains, but the deliverance of the souls of his hearers from the bondage of sin. And in so speaking he adroitly hinted how unfairly he was chained before his judges, and yet how he wished ill to none, but only wished good to all.

30, 31. *And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: and when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.*

He had impressed Agrippa most favourably, and it is quite clear that the King was not jesting with him; he was at least convinced that Paul had done “nothing worthy of death or of bonds.”

32. *Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.*

But it was not God’s purpose that Paul should be set at liberty; he must go to Rome, and must there, before the emperor himself, bear witness which he could not bear as a free man, but which the emperor must hear when Paul was brought before him as a prisoner who had appealed to him, and must therefore be heard in person.

Acts 27

1–3. *And, when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.*

Even a Roman centurion could see that Paul was no ordinary prisoner, and that it was quite safe to allow him privileges which others might have abused.

4–12. *And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; and, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called the fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea. Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more that those things which were spoken by Paul.*

The apostle Paul had given some very good advice to the mariners of this ship. They had thought fit to reject it. What then? Now some of us are of such short temper that, if our advice should be rejected, we should be in a huff, and never offer any more, and we should feel some sort of pleasure in seeing those persons get into mischief, who were so foolish as not to take our sage counsel. Not so the apostle Paul. After he had prudently abstained for some time from saving anything—for there is a time to be silent—he at length gave proof of his unabated affection in them by the good advice which he offered.

It was quite natural that the centurion should think that the master and the owner of the ship knew more about seafaring matters than Paul did, but the sequel proved that the apostle knew more than they did, for he had access to information that was hidden from them.

12, 13. *And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.*

That was not the only voyage that commenced favourably and ended disastrously. He is very unwise who trusts the winds, and equally so is he who sets his confidence upon any earthly thing, for fickle as the wind that blows are all things beneath the moon.

14, 15. *But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.*

Apparently, that was the only thing they could do; and, at times, we may find that it will be well to follow their example. When we have done our best, and can make no headway, we had better commit our vessel to the care of God, and "let her drive" wherever he wills.

16–19. *And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we*

had much work to come by the boat: which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest the should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; and the third day we cast out with our own hands the tacking of the ship.

They used all the means in their power, and evidently Paul and his companions took their full share of the work that had to be done: “we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.”

20–22. *And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them,*

The believer is sure to come to the front. He may be hidden away in the crowd, and his condition and circumstances may put him in the rear rank for a time; but his light will by some means rise out of obscurity. Paul is nothing but a prisoner all the time the ship sails safely: he is courteously entreated, yet he holds rank among others who are being carried to Rome for trial; but the storm comes on, and the ships is driven before the tempest, and he who was only a prisoner becomes practically the chief man in the ship. The owner, the captain, their centurion—these are very small figures in the picture; you scarcely notice them in the group huddled together in the laboring barque. Paul is the center of the whole company, the observed of all. He is as much the master of the ship as Caesar was when, in the tempest, he encouraged the mariners with the words, “Fear not, you carry Caesar and all his fortunes.”

and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.

Paul might well remind the officers of the wise advice he gave them in Crete, but

he did not rest content with that, but went on to cheer them as far as he dared, though he again warned them that they would lose their ship. To prove that he was not speaking without due authority, he added—

23, 24. *For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.*

Oh, what a privilege it would be if God would say the same to us! If, in the night of trouble, when you are tossed to and fro, mother, father, the Lord should say to you, "Fear not, I have given you your whole family they shall all be saved," you would not mind how fiercely the storm might rage if you could be sure of that. And how happy would my heart be if all that sail in this big vessel were given to me! I should not be satisfied even then; I should want a great many more than that; but, still, what a blessed thing it would be to have every soul that sails with us saved!

25, 26. *Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.*

The next chapter tells us that the "certain island was Melita, or Malta as it is now called. In that respect, as in all others, Paul's prophecy was literally fulfilled, for the ship was lost, but all on board were saved.

27. *But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;*

They could hear the roar of the breakers.

28. *And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.*

They found that the water was shallowing very quickly, so they knew that tinny were getting near the shore.

29. *Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.*

Then they "wished for the day, "and how often the Christian throws his great anchor out, and wishes for the day—waiting "till the day break", and the shadows flee away." Well, it will not be long. If night lasts through the whole of this life, the morning cometh—the everlasting morning.

30. *And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out the foreship*

These cowardly sailors meant to get away, and leave the prisoners and passengers and soldiers to perish.

31. *Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.*

Yet God had said that they should be, so that it is quite consistent to believe in divine predestination and yet to see the utility, nay, the necessity, of the use of means: "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."

32. *Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.*

So that the sailors could not get away.

33, 34. *And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat; for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.*

What a grand speech this is! It is the utterance of faith. Talk of eloquence! This is real eloquence—for Paul to be addressing the people in a storm-tossed ship as calmly as if he were safely on shore.

35. *And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.*

After long fasting, he saw the necessity of taking refreshment. And he led the way. He took break, gave thanks to God in the presence of them all, then broke the bread, and himself began to eat. This manly fortitude, this moral courage of the Apostle, repressed, the general agitation and nerved them all with fresh hope, insomuch that they wore all of good cheer, and they also took some food. This was the turning point in their fortune; and, in the issue, they everyone came safe to land.

He would not eat without giving thanks to God. There are some who do, even as the swine do; but the Christian finds it good at all times, before he eats, to bless the God that gave the food to him. It is a Christian habit which should not be given up. Paul gave thanks when it was most inconvenient to do so—when a great storm was raging, and when there were only two or three on board who sympathized with him.

36. *Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.*

Courage is contagious, as well as timidity. The holy bravery of one good man my make many others brave.

37–39. *And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible to thrust in the ship.*

They wanted to let be go ashore, and break up, and so save their lives.

40–42. *And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground, and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.*

The soldiers were responsible for them. It would be required at their hands if a prisoner escaped; so, with that cruelty, and yet that obedience to law which was characteristic of the Roman legions, "the soldiers counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape."

43, 44. *But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.*

So God had said, "and so it came to pass."

Acts 28

1, 2. *And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.*

As much as lieth in us, we should seek to do good unto all men, and we can never know to whom we may be rendering service. These people of Malta never dreamed that they were entertaining an apostle, and it never entered into their heads that their simple act of hospitality would be recorded in the Sacred Scriptures, and that millions of eyes would read of, and millions of minds would think upon, this kind act of theirs on behalf of this shipwrecked company. They really entertained an angel unawares, and they had many blessings in consequence, for we find that Paul afterwards healed the father of the chief man of the island, and others of the inhabitants who were suffering from various diseases.

3-5. *And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks*

It must have been a fine sight to see the great apostle of the Gentiles gathering a bundle of sticks to put on the fire. But the men who can do great things are usually the men who do not disdain to do little things.

3–5. *And laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the*

fire, and felt no harm.

Was not this a fulfillment of the Master's words concerning the signs following faith in him? "They shall take up serpents." Whether this viper had bitten Paul so as to really fill his veins with venom, we do not know, and it is an equal miracle whether it had done so or not. Whether the sting had already poisoned him or not, his life was preserved, and that was sufficient.

6. *Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.*

Those who saw what had happened to him regarded it as so marvellous that they thought he must be one of their heathen deities who had come down to the earth. He was not a god, however; but he was a man of God, and God had preserved him in the hour of peril.

7–10. *In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: who also honored us with many honors; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.*

Happy island of Melita to have such a missionary driven on its shore, to heal the sick, and preach the gospel to the people. The calamities of ministers are often a benediction to the people. The shipwreck of Paul resulted in blessing to that island which otherwise it might have missed. Let us, as God's servants, leave ourselves in his hands, and believe that he can sometimes use us better by means of a shipwreck than if he had given the winds and waves charge concerning us to bear us safely to our desired haven.

11–13. *And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:*

Those who have ever been there regard the spot as almost sacred where Paul set his foot on his way to Rome. It is a place where there is an abundance of hot springs, a place which of old was frequented for healing; I have stood there with intense delight: "We came the next day to Puteoli:"—

14. *Where we found brethren*

There were some Christians there. See how soon the gospel had spread as far as to this sea-port town; probably some Christian sailors carried it there. Blessed will it be when the ships of Tarshish shall bear not only men specially set apart as missionaries, but when every sailor shall be a missionary for Christ. "We came the next day to Puteoli: where we found brethren,"—

and were desired to tarry with them seven days.

So they were able to have one Lord's day together. They were probably only a very small company of poor Christians, but what a joyful privilege it was for them to have the beloved apostle with them for that memorable week in their lives!

And so we went toward Rome.

Now it was a matching band of soldiers taking them as prisoners to appear before the emperor at Rome.

15. *And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and the Three Taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.*

It must have cheered his heart to see that there were some who loved him sufficiently to make a weary tramp along the Appian Road, to meet him, and salute him in the name of their common Lord.

16. *And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.*

This was a great favor, no doubt, but do not forget that he had to have his right hand chained to the left hand of the soldier day and night and that was not very pleasant either for him or for the soldier. Yet he thus had an opportunity of personal intercourse with the soldiers of the Pretorian guard, and as they were continually being changed, Paul no doubt had opportunities of conversation with hundreds of them, and thus the gospel was spread in a very unlikely quarter. Would you like to be chained to a soldier day after day, and month after month? There are some who would not have that experience for half an hour without putting the gospel plainly before the soldier so that he should at least know what it is, even if he did not accept it. That is a wonderful way of preaching—man to man; when they were chained hand to hand, there was no getting away from what Paul had to say.

17-20. *And it came to pass, that after three days*

That was quick work; he had only got into his house three days when he began to work: “After three days”—

17. *Paul called the chief of the Jews together*

There are said to have been seven synagogues in Rome at that time, so the apostle sent for a number of the chief men in the various congregations.

17–20. *And when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me,*

would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

They were all looking for the Messiah, for there was at that time a general expectation of his coming.

21, 22. *And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against.*

Although men did not understand it, they spoke against it. This is often a blessing. This is the kind of advertisement that helps the gospel, for if men will only be sufficiently interested in it to speak against it, they will be likely to come and hear it, and some of them will be almost certain to receive it. The truth never spreads so fast as when men oppose it.

23. *And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.*

You could not have dropped into Paul's lodging at any time during the two years that he was at Rome before the emperor liberated him, without hearing him preach of the "things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ Every arrow in his quiver was aimed at the one target; and he knew how to hit the white of it each time. "This one thing I do," said he. His motto was—All for Jesus, and for Jesus only.

The one topic the apostle brought forward in different ways. When addressing the chief men of the Jews in Rome, observe that he expounded, and testified, and

persuaded. These three methods were needful among the people of those days; and they are the wisest that can be adopted to bring men to Christ even now. We must expound, set forth, explain, make clear the gospel. We must tell men what the Word of God means, in the plainest possible language; for they need to know what it is that the revelation from heaven has really declared.

The more of true exposition the better. We must also testify. We must bear witness to the effect which the gospel has had upon our heart and life. The telling out of our personal experience is a means of grace to our hearers. Paul was wont to describe his own conversion. He told the story of how the Lord appeared unto him in the way to Damascus; and he did this so often, that Luke and others, who were his companions, must have heard it several times. Indeed, it was a tale so worth the telling that none could weary of hearing it.

As Paul was speaking to Jews, he fetched the arguments of his persuasion from their own holy books. I have no doubt that he had spread out on the table before him the books of Moses, and the various rolls of the prophets: to these he continually referred his Jewish friends.

But see the result—the result which always seems to follow the faithful preaching of the truth—

24. *And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.*

This is the only proper way to calculate the results of our ministry. We just want the account-book ruled with two columns. On one side we must put down the long list of the some that believe not; and on the brighter side we may enter what is too often, the far less number of the some that believe. This is the only true method, I repeat it, by which we can hold a stock-taking so as to ascertain the net profit of the preaching of the gospel.

It is the custom of the age to blame ministers very much, and I dare say we deserve it; but still the blame in this matter does not lay entirely with us, for even when Paul preached—a model preacher, he!—there were “some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.”

25, 26. *And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed,*

after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, saying, go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

Had not their hearts been so gross, their eyes so blind, and their ears so dull, they must have believed in Jesus; but as it was, many of the Jewish leaders went away in a pet, quarrelling with those who believed, and angry with Paul. None are such bitter enemies of the cross as those who, by a firm resolve, determine to be blind to its glory and dead to its power.

28. *Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.*

Oh, blessed confidence of the apostle! If some reject the gospel, others will receive it.

29–31. *And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*

What a subject Paul had to preach about, “the kingdom of God, and those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ,” and how faithfully and fearlessly he proclaimed this great theme!

ROMANS

Romans 1

1. *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God.*

Paul has many titles, and he delights to mention them in writing to these Christians at Rome. He puts first his highest title: “A servant of Jesus Christ.” He glories in being a servant of the crucified Christ, a servant of him who was despised and rejected of men; so do we. Paul was called out from among men, effectually “called” of God “to be an apostle, separated”—set apart—“unto the gospel of God.” He believed that he was separated for that purpose at his birth; but he was specially “separated unto the gospel of God” on the road to Damascus. It is a happy thing when a minister feels that he has nothing to do with anything else but the gospel; that commands all his thought, all his talent, all his time.

That expression should be true of every Christian minister. We are not apostles; but we are “separated unto the gospel of God.” I do not think that we are called to have anything to do with party politics, or social problems, or any such questions; we are set apart for this purpose, “separated unto the gospel of God.” There are plenty of people who can attend to those things better than we can. If we mind our own business, or rather, if we mind our Master’s business, we who are ministers will have quite enough to do.

2. *Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures.*

Notice, brethren, how reverent the apostles were to Holy Scripture. They had no doubt about its inspiration. They quoted the old Testament, and delighted to make it a kind of basis for the New Testament: “which he had promised afore by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.”

All the gospel is in the Old Testament as well as in the New, for the gospel which Paul was called to preach was promised afore by the prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

3, 4. *Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:*

What a glorious Lord we serve! He is God's Son: "Jesus Christ our Lord." In his human nature, he is a Man of royal race: "of the seed of David." He was a man, therefore he died: but he rose again, for he was more than man. He is as much the Son of God as he was the Son of man. The humanity is as true as the divinity, the divinity as true as the humanity.

5. *By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all notions, for his name:*

Paul felt that he was sent to preach among all the Gentiles. He had a large bishopric; James might keep to the Jews, but Paul's diocese included every land, he was to preach "among all nations."

6. *Among whom are you also the called of Jesus Christ:*

That is a sweet name for every truly converted man. "Called of Jesus Christ." He has called you personally, he has called you effectually, he has called you out of the world, he has called you into fellowship with himself: "the called of Jesus Christ." The revised version has it: "called to be Jesus Christ's." Those who are called by Christ, are called to be his.

7. *To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints:*

What contrasts we have in the seventh verse! "In Rome, beloved of God." "In Rome called to be saints." God has beloved ones in the darkest parts of the earth. There is all the more reason for them to be saints because they are surrounded by

sinners. They must have had true faith, or they could not have confessed Christ between the jaws of a lion, for they lived in Rome, with Nero hunting after Christians, as if they had been wild beasts, and yet they were not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel is good news; and the man who has to preach it is full of good wishes. He wishes the best possible things to everybody with whom he comes in contact: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

8. *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.*

Oh, I would it were so with us, that we had faith that could be spoken of throughout the whole world! I am afraid that some have none to speak of; these saints in Rome had such faith that the noise thereof went abroad everywhere, and all people wondered at them.

9. *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;*

No wonder that they prospered so well when Paul always made mention of them in his prayers. Some churches would prosper better if some of you remembered them more in prayer. Of course, you all pray for the church of which you are members; could you not set aside in your heart a little space for some poor church that is dwindling down to nothing? Could you not pray it up again? Who knows what blessing would come upon pastor and people if you bore them on your hearts?

This man, Paul, did a great deal by prayer. I remember a minister, who is now with the Lord, who was thanked by his people for his wonderful sermons; but he said to them, "You never thanked me for my prayers, yet they were the best part

of my service for you." When men of God are mighty in prayer, we owe much to them.

10. *Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.*

Paul wanted to go to Rome; but I do not suppose that he ever thought that he would go there at the expense of the government, with an imperial guard to take care of him all the way. We pray, and God gives us the answer to our petitions; but often in a way of which we should never have dreamed. Paul goes to Rome as a prisoner for Christ's sake. Now suppose Paul had gone to Rome in any other capacity, he could not have seen Caesar, he could not have obtained admission into Caesar's house. The prison of the Palatine was just under the vast palace of the Caesars; and everybody in the house could come into the guard-room and have a talk with Paul if they were minded so to do. I suppose that, whatever I might be willing to pay, I could not have preached in the palace of the Queen, even in this nominally Christian country; but Paul was installed as a royal chaplain over Caesar's household in the guard-room of the Palatine prison. How wonderfully God works to accomplish his divine purposes!

Paul prayed about that matter, and we may pray about our journeys. I like to hear the old-fashioned expression, "Be pleased, O Lord, to grant journeying mercies," for there are such things; and when the servants of God are going about, with a view to spread the gospel, we ought to pray that they may travel in safety.

11. *For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;*

He wanted to go to Rome because he felt that he would take something with him. He was a poor man, so he could not take any golden or silver gifts; but he was a chosen mail, so he believed that he could impart unto them some spiritual gift. Oh, what a largess does a man of God distribute when his Lord is with him!

12. *That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith of you and me.*

Paul wanted his faith to establish theirs, and their faith to establish his. Christians grow rich by and exchange of spiritual commodities; and I am afraid some Christians are very poor because they do not engage in the spiritual bartering with one another. You know how it was in the old time, “They that feared the Lord spake often one to another.” Shall I tell you how it is now? They that fear not the Lord speak often one against another. That is a very sad difference. Oh, for more Christian communion; for when we blend our “mutual faith:, we are “comforted together”; each believer grows stronger as he cheers his brother in the Lord!

13. *Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,)*

Ah! Paul, you could not go when you wished. Caesar must convoy you. Your Master would have you go to Rome under the protection of the eagles of your empire. God has servants everywhere: he can make Satan himself provide the body-guard for his faithful apostle’s journey.

That I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

Rome was a sink of iniquity; it was the den of the lions, where Nero was, who would speedily devour, like a lion, the minister of Christ. Paul wanted somehow to get into that old city on the seven hills, and to pluck some fruit for God even from the vine that was planted there; but he was hindered.

14. *I am a debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.*

Paul felt a debt to everybody. The God who saved him, had saved him that he might preach the gospel in every place he could reach. Brethren, if you have received much from God, you are so much the debtor to men; and you are debtors not only to the respectable, but to the disreputable, debtors not only to those who come to a place of worship, but to the dwellers in the slums, “to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; to the wise and to the unwise.”

15. *So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.*

He had preached the gospel throughout a great part of Asia, he had crossed over into Europe, he had proclaimed the Word through Greece; and if ever an opportunity should occur for him to get to the capital of the world, whatever might be the danger to which he would be exposed, he was prepared to go. He was ready to go anywhere for Jesus, anywhere to preach the gospel, anywhere to win a soul, anywhere to comfort the people of God.

I do not suppose that Paul guessed that he would be sent to Rome at the government expense, but he was. The Roman Empire had to find a ship for him, and a fit escort for him, too; and he entered the city as an ambassador in bonds. When our hearts are set on a thing, and we pray for it, God may grant us the blessing; but, it may be, in a way that we never looked for.

You shall go to Rome, Paul; but you shall go in chains. He had not thought of that plan; still, it was the best way in which he could go. I do not know how he could have preached to the Emperor except as a prisoner; but when he was brought before him to be tried, then he had an opportunity of speaking even to the brutal creature who was called the Emperor of Rome.

16. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ:*

Many other people were ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It was too simple; it had not enough of mystery about it; it had not enough of worldly wisdom about it. Paul says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,” and then gives his reason for not being ashamed of it—

For it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

At this day, is not the gospel in itself the rod of Jehovah’s strength? Is it not the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth? And doth not our beloved apostle constantly insist upon it, that it is not with wisdom of words, nor with fineness of speech, lest the excellency of the power should not be of God, but of man; and lest man’s faith should stand in the wisdom of man, and not in

the power of the Most High?

17. *For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.*

The gospel tells us about this living by faith, this believing, this receiving righteousness through believing, and not through working. This is the sweet story of the cross, of which Paul was not ashamed.

It is through faith that a man becomes just, for otherwise, before the law of God he is convicted of being unjust: being justified by faith, he is enrolled among the just ones. It is through faith that he is at first quickened and breathes the air of heaven, for naturally he was dead in trespasses and sins.

As it is by faith that we come out from the world and begin to tread the heavenly road, so it must be by faith that we walk all the journey through. Till we this veil of flesh lay down, till the angel of death shall rend the curtain and we shall see face to face, let us not hope to walk by sight or sense, but only by faith in the living God.

18. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;*

Those last words may be read, “Who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.” They will not let the truth work upon their hearts; they will not allow it to operate in their minds; but they try to make it an excuse for their sin. Is there anybody here who is holding down the truth to prevent its entering his heart? I fear that there are some such persons, who have come here for years, and the truth has pricked them, troubled them, made them lie awake at night; but they are holding it down, like one who grasps a wild animal by the ears, and holds it down for fear it should bite him. Oh, sirs, when you are afraid of the truth, you may be well be afraid of hell! When you and the truth quarrel, you had better end your fighting soon, for you will have the worst of it if you do not yield: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold down the truth in unrighteousness.”

19, 20. *Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

Men who never heard the gospel can see God in his works if they open their eyes. There is written upon the face of nature enough to condemn men if they do not turn to God. There is a gospel of the sea, and of the heavens, of the stars, and of the sun; and if men will not read it, they are guilty, for they are wilfully ignorant of what they might know, and ought to know.

21, 22. *Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*

Even in old Rome, with all its darkness, there was some knowledge of God: how can the creature quite forget its Creator? Of course the people had not that spiritual knowledge which the Holy Ghost communicates to the renewed in heart, for the carnal mind cannot know God spiritually: its fleshly ideas cannot come near to his holy spirituality. But Paul means that they perceived the eternal power and Godhead of the Great Former of all things; and they might have perceived much more of his divine character and glory if their foolish hearts had not been darkened by their evil passions.

Those do not glorify God as God who do not trace all their good things to God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,” but many ungrateful hearts forget this truth, and receive the blessings of this life with dumb mouths and cold hearts.

23, 24. *And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lust of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies*

between themselves:

It is very easy to make a beast of yourself when you have made a beast to be your god, as the Egyptians did, when they worshipped the god that they had made in the form of an ox, or a crocodile, or a cat.

25. *Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.*

There are many preachers who have “changed the truth of God into a lie”; and by their exaltation of man, they have “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever.” God save all of us from such idolatry as that! Amen.

Romans 2

1. *Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.*

The apostle singled out an individual who had condemned others for transgressions, in which he himself indulged. This man owned so much spiritual light that he knew right from wrong, and he diligently used his knowledge to judge others, condemning them for their transgressions. As for himself, he preferred the shade, where no fierce light might beat on his own conscience and disturb his unholy peace. His judgment was spared the pain of dealing with his home offenses by being set to work upon the faults of others. He had a candle, but he did not place it on the table to light his own room; he held it out at the front door to inspect therewith his neighbors who passed by.

Did you ever think of this, you that judge others, that you are laying down the standard by which you will have to be judged yourselves? I generally find that those who are most severe towards others need and often expect great leniency towards themselves, but it will not be so at the last, for thus it is written, “With what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged.” How easy it will be to judge the faultfinding at the judgment day. The Judge will only have to say, “They have already condemned themselves: they have condemned their own faults as they saw them in others; they have used the sharpest judgments against less faults than their own; out of their own mouth let them take the sentence and depart.” You will have to render no account for other people, but you will have to render an account of yourself and how you judged other people. The last account will be wholly personal, therefore see ye to it.

2, 3. *But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O*

man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

Well did the apostle aim that piercing arrow; it hits the center of the target and strikes a folly common to mankind. The punishment which is due to sin the guilty reckon to be surely impending upon others, but they scarce believe that it can ever fall upon themselves. A personal doom for themselves is an idea which they will not harbour: if the dread thought should light upon them they shake it off as men shake snowflakes from their cloaks. The thought of personal guilt, judgment, and condemnation is inconvenient; it breeds too much trouble within, and so they refuse it lodging. Vain men go maundering on their way, whispering of peace and safety; doting as if God had passed an act of amnesty and oblivion for them, and had made for them an exception to all the rules of justice, and all the manner of his courts.

Do men indeed believe that they alone shall go unpunished? No man will subscribe to that notion when it is written down in black and white, and yet the mass of men live as if this were true; I mean the mass of men who have sufficient light to condemn sin in others. They start back from the fact of their own personal guiltiness and condemnation, and go on in their ungodliness as if there were no great white throne for them, no last assize, no judge, no word of condemnation, and no hell of wrath.

4. *Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering;*

Sin is always on the downward grade, so that when a man proceeds a certain length he inevitably goes beyond it. The person addressed by the apostle first thought to escape judgment, and then he came to think lightly of the goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering of God. He thinks he shall escape in the future, and because of that he despises the present goodness and longsuffering of the Most High.

Not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

The goodness of God to a man of evil life is not intended to encourage him to

continue in his sin, but it is meant to woo and win him away from it. God manifests his infinite gentleness and love that he may thereby kill man's sin; and that, by his tender mercy, he may win man's hard heart unto himself; and that, by his abundant lovingkindness, he may awaken man's conscience to a sense of his true position in his Maker's sight, that he may turn away from the sin which he now loves, and may seek his God, whom he has despised and neglected.

5. *But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;*

See yonder men and women; they are dancing merrily. Though all overhead is black, not a drop of rain has fallen yet. Mark how they are marrying and giving in marriage, for not a bolt has yet been launched. Who are these? Alas! poor wretches, these are the men for whom the Judge is treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. For them he is reserving fire and brimstone, hot coals of juniper, and terrible destruction. They look askance on yonder pilgrims slightly wetted with the storm; they make a mock of yonder poor converted ones, trembling as they hear the rolling thunder. They say, "We hear no tempest; it is all a delusion, there is no storm."

Ay, sinners; but the day is coming when you shall discover your mistake. You have your portion here; but believers are happier, as they are all saved for the great hereafter. You have no bands in your death;—it is that you may have the tighter bands in hell. You have few afflictions here;—it is that they may be doubled to you hereafter. You go merrily through this world, you carry the lamp of joy with you;—it is that your blackness may be the more terrible, and your darkness the more awful, when you are excluded from earthly joys, and shut up for ever in the outer darkness, where there will be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

6. *Who will render to every man according to his deeds:*

Since the actions of men are evidently left unpunished now, and high-handed sin holds power, there must come a righting of the wrong and a clearing of the just. The Judge of all the earth must do right, and how can this be but by a final adjustment in which it shall be clearly seen that though the wicked prosper for a

while, they are as bullocks fattening for the slaughter; and though the righteous suffer for a while, it is but as the gold suffers in the furnace, that it may come forth purified. Every heart that has ever groaned under the oppressor's wrong, every soul that has ever writhed under the proud man's contumely, must feel that there must be an end to the reign and riot of evil, and a time in which innocence shall be avenged. Every Job may lift up himself before his false accusers, and say, "I know that my avenger liveth, and that he will stand in the latter day upon the earth."

Moreover, there is in the consciences of most, if not of all, men a testimony to a coming judgment. I will not say of all men, for I believe that some manage so to drug their self-consciousness as at last to quiet all their fears; but yet the most of men believe in a judgment to come, and in their more thoughtful moods are alarmed thereat. There is more faith as to the judgment than we dream in those who are most profanely daring in their speeches against God. The reason why they speak so exceeding proudly is because their consciences make them cowards, and to veil their cowardice they use bombastic words. These are the men that tremble first, the men that first cry out for mercy when the hand of God begins to touch them.

7-10. *To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:*

To the saints the judgment of the things done shall be according to righteousness, for these things shall be taken in evidence that they were indeed reconciled to God. The Judge will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundations of the world." And then shall come the evidence: "For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; thirsty, and ye gave me drink," and so on. These fruits shall be the evidence that they were in Christ, the evidence of their being justified by faith; while on the other hand the sour and bitter fruit of the ungodly shall be an evidence that they were not planted of the Lord.

11. *For there is no respect of persons with God.*

The great Judge himself shall give the decision: he shall pronounce sentence upon the wicked, and execute their punishment. No partiality shall there be seen; there shall be no private conferences to secure immunity for nobles, no hushing up of matters, that great men may escape contempt for their crimes. All men shall stand before the one great judgment-bar; evidence shall be given concerning them all, and a righteous sentence shall go forth from his mouth who knows not how to flatter the great.

12, 13. *For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.*

If you are to be saved by the commandments you must do them: that is clear. Moses does not allow any person to dream that under the law he can be saved in any other way than by perfect obedience thereto. “For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.” Whatever it is that God has commanded, you must do; whatever he forbids, you must avoid; for by such obedience alone can you live.

Mark you, Moses does not tone down the law to suit our fallen state, or talk of our doing our best and God’s being satisfied with our imperfect obedience. No, he says only, “He that doeth those things shall live by them.” He demands perfect and entire obedience, if life is to come of it. He does not say that if you have broken the law you may still live by some other means. No, if the law is once broken it is all over with you as to salvation thereby: one single fault takes away the possibility of your ever being justified by the law. “He that doeth those things,” that is, always, without exception, with all his heart and soul and strength—“he shall live by them”; but nobody else. Be he Jew or be he Gentile, his only righteousness by law must come through the doing of the law.

14, 15. *For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their*

hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

Paul tells us that those who have sinned without law shall be punished without law; but the Jewish nation, having received the law, if they broke it, would become peculiarly liable to the curse which was threatened for such breach. Yet further, all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth are also subject to this curse, for this reason: that if the law was not given to all from Sinai; it has been written by the finger of God more or less legibly upon the conscience of all mankind. It needs no prophet to tell an Indian, a Laplander, a South Sea Islander, that he must not steal; his own judgment so instructs him. There is that within every man which ought to convince him that idolatry is folly, that adultery and unchastity are villanies, that theft, and murder, and covetousness, are all evil. Now, inasmuch as all men in some degree have the law within, to that degree they are under the law; the curse of the law for transgression comes upon them.

16. *In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men*

You and I and all the myriad myriads of our race shall be gathered before the throne of the Son of God. Then, when all are gathered, the indictment will be read, and each one will be examined concerning things done in the body, according to that he hath done. Then the books shall be opened, and everything recorded there shall be read before the face of heaven. Every sinner shall then hear the story of his life published to his everlasting shame. The good shall ask no concealment, and the evil shall find none.

By “the secrets of men,” the Scripture means those secret crimes which hide themselves away by their own infamy, which are too vile to be spoken of, which cause a shudder to go through a nation if they be but dragged, as they ought to be, into the daylight. Secret offenses shall be brought into judgment; the deeds of the night and of the closed room, the acts which require the finger to be laid upon the lip, and a conspiracy of silence to be sworn.

By Jesus Christ.

He that will sit upon the throng as the Vice-gerent of God, and as a Judge, acting for God, will be Jesus Christ. What a name for a Judge! The Savior-Anointed—

Jesus Christ: he is to be the Judge of all mankind. Our Redeemer will be the Umpire of our destiny.

According to my gospel.

After Paul has thus written in anguish he bethought himself of his chief comfort. While his pen was black with the words he had written in the first chapter, he was driven to write of his great delight. He cling to the gospel with a greater tenacity than ever. As in the verse before us he needed to mention the gospel, he did not speak of it as "the gospel," but as "my gospel." "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel." He felt that he could not live in the midst of so depraved a people without holding the gospel with both hands, and grasping it as his very own.

"My gospel," saith he. Not that Paul was the author of it, not that Paul had an exclusive monopoly of its blessings, but that he had so received it from Christ himself, and regarded himself as so responsibly put in trust with it, that he could not disown it even for an instant. So fully had he taken it into himself that he could not do less than call it "my gospel." In another place he speaks of "our gospel"; thus using a possessive pronoun, to show how believers identify themselves with the truth which they preach. He had a gospel, a definite form of truth, and he believed in it beyond all doubt; and therefore he spoke of it as "my gospel."

17-24. *Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you,*

as it is written.

Remember, the higher the pinnacle of profession the direr your fall of destruction. Beggared kings, exile princes, crownless emperors, are always subjects of pity. Professor, what wilt thou think of thyself when thy robes are taken from thee, when thy crown of profession is taken from thy head, and thou standest the hiss of even vile men, the scoff of blasphemers, the jeer of those who whatever they were, were not hypocrites, as thou art? They will cry to thee, "Art thou become like one of us? Thou professor, thou high-flying man, art thou become like one of us?" And ye will hide your guilty heads in the dark pit of perdition, but all in vain, for you never will be able to avoid that hiss which shall ever greet you. "What! thou!" the drunkard whom you told to drink no more will say "Art thou become like one of us?" And the harlot whom you scorned, and the young debauched man whom you warned, will stare you in the face, and say, "What! you! You who talked of religion. A pretty fellow you were! Art thou become one of us?" Oh! I think I hear them saying in hell, "Here's a parson, come here; here's a deacon; here's a church member; here's a man who has had the sacramental wine within his lips; here's a man that has had the baptismal water on his garments."

25. *For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.*

Paul is dealing with the Jew, who was apt to think that he must have a preference beyond the Gentiles on account of his circumcision.

26–29. *Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision! And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature if it fulfill the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law? For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter: whose praise is not of men, but of God.*

If this principle were fully recognized everywhere, it would certainly put an end to all that notion of sacramentarianism which some men hold. It is not the outward, not the external, not the form And ceremony; it is the inward work of the spirit; it is holiness and change of heart. Let none of us ever fall into the gross error of those who imagine that there is attached to certain ceremonies a certain degree of grace. It is not so. He is not a Christian which is one outwardly, he is a Christian who is one inwardly.

Romans 3

1. *What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what profit is there of circumcision?*

If, after all, both Jew and Gentiles were under sin, what advantage had the Jew by the covenant under which he lived? Or what was the benefit to him of the circumcision which was his distinctive mark?

2. *Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*

The Jews were God's chronicle-keepers. They had to guard the holy Books, "the oracles of God." They had also to preserve the knowledge of the truth by those divers rites and ceremonies by which God was pleased to reveal himself of old time. It is no small blessing to have a revelation from Jehovah, and to have the means of knowing what that revelation really is.

3. *For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?*

It was a privilege to belong to the Jewish people, even though many through their unbelief did not avail themselves of the privilege. Could it be that their unbelief would turn God from his purpose to bless the chosen people? Would their want of faith affect God's faithfulness?

4. *God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, that thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou are judged.*

However faithless men might be, God was still true and faithful. Paul quotes the Septuagint, which thus renders David's words.

5. *But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say?*

If it so turns out, that even man's sin makes the holiness of God the more illustrious, what shall we say?

Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man.)

Paul spoke as a mere carnal man might be supposed to speak. If ever we are obliged, for the sake of argument, to ask a question which is almost blasphemous, let us do it very guardedly, and say something to show that we really do not adopt the language as our own, just as Paul says, "I speak as a man." If the very sin of man is made to turn to the glory of God, is God unjust in punishing that sin?

6. *God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?*

God will judge the world; and he does judge the world even now. There are judgments against nations already executed, and recorded on the page of history. If God were unjust, how could he judge the world?

7. *For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?*

Yet I shall be. If God shall overrule my sin to his own glory, that will make no difference to my responsibility. If I have lied, if I have done wrong in any way, I must be judged and condemned on that account, whatever may be the ultimate result of my sin.

If God has even turned the opposition of evil men to the establishment of his truth, as he has often done; why, then, are men punished for it? These are deep, dark questions, which come out of the proud heart of man, and Paul ventures to

answer them.

8. *And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? Whose damnation is just.*

If any man dares to say, “Since God turns even evil into good, and by the forgiveness of sin brings glory to himself, ‘Let us do evil that good may come,’” he is wresting truth to his own destruction, and his “damnation is just.”

If all the good in the world could come of a single evil action, we have no right to do it. We must never do evil with the hope of advancing God’s cause. If God chooses to turn evil into good, as he often does, that is no reason why we should do evil; and it is no justification of sin. The murder of Christ at Calvary has brought the greatest possible benefit to us; yet it was a high crime against God, the greatest of all crimes, when man turned deicide, and slew the Son of God.

9. *What then? are we better than they?*

But the Jews said, “Ah, but this is a description of the Gentiles.” So Paul replies, “What then? are we better than they?

No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentile, that they are all under sin;

Read the earlier chapters of this Epistle, chapters that are enough to make the heart sick to read them, and to make the head ache with the memory of them, and when you have read them, you will say that Paul has proved that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin.

Now he quotes a set of texts from Israel’s own holy Books, to show the universal depravity of men. Notice how he rings the changes on the words “all” and “none.”

10. *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:*

There is not, and there never has been, one of the human race, save our Lord, who also is God, who ever continued to live a righteous life. Adam commenced righteously, but how soon he fell; and all his descendants have both commenced and continued to be sinners: “There is none righteous, no, not one.”

11. *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*

That is, none do so by nature; those who seek after God are led to do so by a work of grace upon their hearts. Otherwise, men are blind, they do not see the right path; they are wilful, and do not seek after God.

12. *They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

This is God’s verdict upon the whole human race. He has the best opportunity of seeing them, and he has the best capacity for judging them; and this is what he says of all men as they are by nature, “There is none that doeth good, no, not one.”

Yet men come and talk to us about the righteous heathen whose virtues they extol, the imaginary good people, for there are none such actually in existence. Here the Lord himself is speaking, and the Spirit of God is quoting from passages of the Old Testament, which he puts together to describe the character of humanity. How sweeping are all the terms!

13. *Their throat is an open sepulcher;*

A reeking mass of corruption. Paul does not use flattering words, as those preachers do who prate about the dignity of human nature. Man was a noble creature when he was made in the image of God; but sin blotted out all his dignity.

With their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

They are pleased to say a bad word of their neighbor; they are eager to repeat any slander that they hear, and they are not unwilling even to invent it themselves.

14, 15. *Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: their feet are swift to shed blood:*

And when, by fear of the laws of the land, they are prevented from carrying out their evil purposes, yet their anger is itself murder in intent; and into what human heart has not that sin glanced?

Here is a description of all men. If some say, “Well, my feet were never swift to shed blood,” you probably have not been put into circumstances which would evoke that cruel passion. So we thought till lately: we thought we were all so civilized that we were to have war no more. Believe me, let the trumpet be sounded and cannon be heard, and there is a devil in our humanity which would not soon be awakened, and we, too, might become as fierce as any other nation. It is still true of men.

16–18. *Destruction and misery are in their ways.*

How true that last verse is of many today! Their sins are destroying them, the lusts of the flesh destroy the body, drunkenness and such like sine are destructive habits, and they make those who practice them to be miserable: “Destruction and misery are in their ways.” What miserable persons, what miserable families, what miserable countries, are made by indulgence in sin! There is no true happiness without holiness.

17. *And the way of peace have they not known:*

Quietness, happiness, and rest are not known by sinful men. They are not in the way of finding peace.

18. *There is no fear of God before their eyes,*

How true is this terrible accusation, especially of this present age! Men seem to be casting off all fear of God. Anyone who reads human history will, I think, detect that the present condition of society in our country, religiously, is wonderfully like the condition of France before the great Revolution, which brought so much bloodshed with it. Everything seems loosening, and broadening, and tending downwards; and especially "there is no fear of God before their eyes."

All these passages, which Paul has put together in this dreadful mosaic, are taken from the Old Testament, so they apply to the Jews; and he had already proved, in the first chapter, the intolerable vice of the Gentiles, so that now he has shown that both Jews and Gentiles are guilty.

19. *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped*

The law was given to the Jews, and the descriptions which it gives must be descriptions of the Jews. "Therefore," says Paul, "as Gentile mouths have been already stopped by the descriptions of their vices, you also, the favored people of God, have your mouths stopped by the descriptions of yourselves taken from your own prophets."

Every man by nature tries to open his mouth, and say the best he can for himself, but it is the object of God's law to shut every man's mouth; and when we come to that condition, then there is hope for us. When we have nothing to say for ourselves, then the Lord Jesus will open his mouth for the dumb, and plead for the guilty in the courts of God.

And all the world may become guilty before God.

That is the true condition of the whole world, "guilty before God." This is the right attitude for the whole human race, to stand with its finger on its lip, having nothing to say as to why it should not be condemned.

20. *Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

All the law does, is to show us how sinful we are. Paul has been quoting from the sacred Scriptures; and truly, they shed a lurid light upon the condition of human nature. The light can show us our sin; but it cannot take it away.

The law of the Lord is like a looking-glass. Now, a looking-glass is a capital thing for finding out where the spots are on your face; but you cannot wash in a looking-glass, you cannot get rid of the spots by looking in the glass. The law is intended to show a man how much he needs cleansing; but the law cannot cleanse him. “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” The law proves that we are condemned, but it does not bring us our pardon.

21. *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;*

The death of Christ gloriously set forth divine justice, because it taught manifestly this truth, that sin can never go without punishment. It is a law of God’s moral universe that sin must be punished. He has made that as necessary as the law of gravitation. Christ, therefore, must himself give a satisfaction for sin, that this rule may be declared, and written upon the forefront of the skies—God will not pardon sin by overlooking it; there must be redemption before there can be remission.

22. *Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon them that believe:*

There is no righteousness of works on the face of the earth. The law itself describes men as being sinful from their throat to their feet. Almost every member of the body is mentioned and described as being foul with sin. We cannot become righteous by the law. Paul says that there is no one who has ever obtained righteousness in that way. We, on the contrary, have so sinned that we never can become righteous through the law; but there is a new way of righteousness, the way of the righteousness of God; and God’s righteousness is much better than the best human righteousness can ever be conceived to be. There is a righteousness which comes to us by faith in Jesus Christ, not by doing, but by believing, a righteousness which is freely bestowed upon all them that believe.

23. *For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

There are degrees of guilt; but all men have sinned. There is no difference in that respect, whatever gradations there may be in sinners.

24. *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:*

That is a very wonderful verse, every word of it is full of meaning. “Justified”—that is, accounted just, made to be righteous in the sight of God. “Justified freely”—without any merit or purchase money. “Freely by his grace”—not an act of justice, but an act of mercy has made sinners just in the sight of God. “Through the redemption”—there is the foundation of it all, we are redeemed by precious blood: “Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

25. *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*

When Christ became a propitiation, he declared God’s righteousness for the remission of sin. We are pardoned through the forbearance of God. For thousands of years, men lived and sinned, and yet were justified;—rebelled, and yet were forgiven—wandered, yet wore restored. I say, for thousands of years, poor fallible men claimed complete righteousness, and entered into the rewards which belong exclusively to those who are justified before God. There they go, streaming up to heaven, a long bright line of patriarchs, and prophets, and warriors for the holy cause, and kings, and priests, and saintly men and women, who believed in God, and this was imputed to them for righteousness.

Now here we are in a difficulty. A just God is saving all these sinners, and taking them to heaven, without any sort of vindication of his justice! But Christ comes in, and declares the righteousness of God “for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God,” and all the difficulties of the antediluvian, and patriarchal, and Mosaic times are cleared up at once.

26. *To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*

Every sinner knows that sin must be punished. He may trifle with that knowledge, but he cannot destroy it; and he never can get any peace of mind, when his conscience is really awakened, till he learns this great truth—God punished Christ instead of you. Christ has so honored the law of God that, without God being unjust, or being thought to be so, he can forgive you. There has been such a satisfaction offered to God's violated purity, that he can be discovered to be infinitely pure, nay, severely just, and yet, at the same time, infinitely gracious and merciful.

27. *Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.*

It is shut out. If men be saved not at all by works, but altogether by the free grace of God through the merits of Christ, then boasting hath the gate shut in its face. But by what law is boasting shut out?

28. *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.*

The apostle Paul peremptorily, over and over again, tells us that salvation is not by works; nay, he tells us that it is not by works and grace put together; he testifies that the two principles neutralise and kill each other, and that a man must either be saved wholly as the result of God's favor, or else he must be saved altogether as the result of his own merit, for the two principles cannot in any way be combined.

29. *Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:*

He saved Abraham by faith, and he saves us by faith. The same saving principle is applicable to all parts of the human race.

30, 31. *Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.*

Whether Jews or Gentiles, there was no salvation for them by the works of the law; the only way in which the circumcised or the uncircumcised could be justified was by faith.

31. *Do we then make void the law through faith?*

Some will be sure to say so; but it is not true.

God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

There is no one who so much loves the law of God, and delights in it after the inward man, as the one who is justified by faith. There is nothing that so honors the law as "the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ." It establishes for ever the law, even as Christ said to his disciples, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled."

Romans 4

1. *What shall we say then that Abraham, our father as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?*

What blessings did really come to Abraham, the father of the faithful? What is the nature of that covenant of grace which God made with him?

2. *For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.*

Certainly, before God, Abraham neither gloried nor yet was justified by his works.

3. *For what saith the scripture?*

That is the question for us always to ask, “What saith the Scripture?”

Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

There is no doubt about that point, for in Genesis 15:6 we read, “He believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” He stands as the great Father of believers, and this is the charter given to him, and given to all believers in him.

4. *Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.*

That is to say, to him who hopes to be saved by his works, to whom salvation is of merit. He has worked for the reward. He has earnt it. Do not talk about grace in that case. He gets what he earns, what he deserves to have, what he receives is "not reckoned of grace, but of debt."

5. *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is cornered for righteousness.*

This is the man who does not go upon the line of works—who does not rest in his works at all, or bring them as a price to God. "His faith is counted for righteousness." It is a very wonderful thing that faith should stand in the stead of righteousness, and should make righteous all those that believe in God by Jesus Christ.

6–8. *Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works. Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*

There is a special blessedness, therefore, which comes to those who, by faith, are under the dispensation of grace. It came to Abraham, and it came to David; yet both Abraham and David were circumcised men belonging to a special race.

9. *Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also?*

Is this blessing entailed upon the natural seed of Abraham alone, or is it for others besides the Jews? Is circumcision so necessary that a man is justified by faith after he is circumcised, and could not be so justified if he were an uncircumcised man?

For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

He was not saved by his works, but by his faith. His faith was the means of the imputation to him of the righteousness of the Savior who was yet to come.

10. *How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision?*

Look back to the history. See in what condition Abraham was when faith was reckoned to him for righteousness. Was it when he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? The answer is—

Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

If you turn again to Genesis 15:6, and then to 17:10, you will find that Abraham was justified by faith before the rite of circumcision was instituted. The blessing came to him "not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision."

11. *And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised:*

The sign is to follow the thing signified. He is, first of all, justified by his faith, and then afterwards he receives the token of the covenant.

That he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised: that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

It is a very remarkable fact. A great many readers of the Book of Genesis would never have noticed it if the Holy Ghost had not called attention to the fact that father Abraham was justified by his faith before he was circumcised; and this is the reason of it—that he might be the father of all believers, whether they be circumcised or uncircumcised. "That righteousness might be imputed to them also."

12. *And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.*

The historical argument is a very forcible one. The blessing was not given to

Abraham as a circumcised man, but as a believing man; and hence it comes also to all of us who believe. What a mercy it is that there is, in this sense, no distinction between Jew and Gentile now!

I hate that plan of reading the Scriptures in which we are told, when we lay hold of a gracious promise, “Oh, that is for the Jews.” “Then I also am a Jew, for it is given to me.” Every promise of God’s Word belongeth to all those who have the faith to grasp it. We who have faith, are all in the covenant, and are thus the children of faithful Abraham; so be not afraid, ye who are the true seed, to take every blessing that belongs to your father Abraham and to all the seed.

13. *For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*

The law was promulgated on Mount Sinai four hundred years after the covenant of grace was made with Abraham the father of believers, and so made with all believers, for they are his true seed, and God has entered into a covenant of grace and salvation with them.

14. *For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, And the promise made of none effect:*

If you are upon that tack of salvation by the law, then what have you to do with faith? And what have you to do with promise, and what have you to do with Christ? You are on a different line altogether.

15. *Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.*

That is plain enough. You cannot break a law it there is not any; and thus, through our sinfulness, the law becomes a cause of sin, and never does it become the cause of justification. So that the law is not for justification, but for condemnation. It is the law that reveals sin, and that shows sin to be sin; so men can never become right with God by the law.

16. *Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace:*

Salvation is by faith alone, that it may be seen to be of the free favor of God, that we may not look to merit or look to human strength, but may look away to the abounding mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

To the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.

Not a father of one select race of people only, but a father of all who, in any land, and speaking any language, are believers in the glorious Jehovah, who is the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.

17. *Before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Abraham was a believer in the God of resurrection, expecting to see Isaac raised up from the dead if he did actually offer him as a sacrifice to God.*

He was a believer in things that were not yet apparent to him, looking forward to them, and expecting to see them in due time; believing in them because he believed in God, who "calleth those things which be not as though they were."

18. *Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.*

He was an old man, with a very aged wife, yet the Lord promised that he should be "the father of many nations." He firmly believed that which was spoken, and in due time it came to pass.

19, 20. *And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the*

deadness of Sarah's womb; He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God:

Men seem to think that only workers can give glory to God; but there is more glory given to God by one drachma of faith than by a ton of works. After all, works usually generate conceit and pride in us. But faith lays itself low before its God, and gives to him all the glory. God is never more glorified than he is by the believing confidence of his people when difficulties seem to come in the way. He was "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

21. *And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*

That is the kind of faith we want, the faith that does not enquire how God can perform his promise, but believes that he will do it.

22. *And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.*

O soul, if thou art like one who is dead, if thou art devoid of all strength, and grace, and savor, if thou canst but believe in God who can quicken the dead, if thou wilt but trust thy soul in the hands of him who is able even to raise dry bones out of their graves, and make them live, thy faith shall be imputed unto thee for righteousness! Thy faith is that which shall justify thee in the sight of God, and thou shalt be "accepted in the Beloved." Oh, what marvels faith works! This is the root-grace, all manner of good things spring from faith, but there must be faith as the root if there are to be other graces as the fruit. Do thy God the honor to believe him—to believe that he cannot lie—to believe that he has never promised what he is not able to perform. If thou wilt do that, it is clear that thou art one of Abraham's seed, and the covenant made with Abraham was made with thee also.

23–25. *Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification.*

See the great object of saving faith—Christ, once dead, has been raised from the dead, and if thou wouldst be saved, thou must rely upon the crucified and risen Savior. If thou thus believest that Jesus the crucified is the Christ of God, the anointed Messiah and Redeemer, thou provest that thou art born of God; and if thou trustest thyself to the risen and glorified Christ, thou hast risen in him, and thou shalt rise to be with him for ever and ever.

Romans 5

1. *Therefore*

The apostle Paul had the logical faculty largely developed, so his writings are full of “therefores.” And the Christian religion, as a whole, stands logically connected—doctrine with doctrine, truth with truth. Error is inconsistent with itself, but truth is consistent, logical, and unerring.

Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

It is a matter of present possession, and present enjoyment. Whatever tribulation there may be in the world, “we have peace with God.” Blessed be God for that glorious fact! We may not have peace with all men, though we would seek to have that; but “we have peace with God.”

2. *By whom also*

What! is not that first verse all? Oh, no! there is more to follow. When you get a hold of one golden link of the blessed chain of grace, it pulls up another, and then another, and then another: “By whom also”—

We have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand,

We are not only at peace with God, but we are permitted to draw near to him, we have access to him, we have access to his favor, to his grace. We may come to God when we will; for he is reconciled to us, and we are reconciled to him, so we may now think of him with joy and gladness.

See what we owe to Christ—not only justification and peace, but we have access into the grace in which we stand; for, when a man is at peace with God, then he longs to get to God, and to speak with God. Christ is the door, and Christ is the way; we come to God by Jesus Christ. This is no small privilege. Oh, you who have ever felt what it is to be shut out from God, let your heart sing as you know that you now have access by faith into this grace wherein you stand!

And rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

If there is any man who may and must rejoice, it is the man who has peace with God, and expects to dwell with God for ever, having access to God by Jesus Christ.

This is a golden staircase, justification brings peace, and peace brings access into this grace wherein we are established; and then comes the joy of hope, and that hope fixes its eye on nothing less than the glory of God. Grace is the stepping-stone to glory; and they who are justified by faith shall in due time be glorified by love. So we ascend this golden ladder, from faith to peace, from peace to access with God, and from this to joy by the way of hope. Happy people, who know this blessed way of climbing out of the sorrows of the present into the glory that shall be revealed!

3. *And not only so*

Whenever the apostle begins to talk of the Lord's bounties to his people, he abounds in "also's" and in "not only so's." As if he had not said enough already, when he had reminded us of the joy of hope in God's glory, he says, "And not only so." We have something in possession as well as something to hope for; we have a present glory as well as glory laid up in store: "And not only so,"—

But we glory in tribulations also:

Beloved, it is a mark of great grace to be able to acquiesce in tribulation, and to accept it with patient resignation at the Lord's hands; but it is a sign of a still higher state of grace when we glory in tribulation—when we welcome it and say, "Now, the Lord is about to elevate me to the upper class in his school—to teach

me some deeper truths than I have hitherto learned, to give me a closer acquaintance with some mystery of his kingdom than I have previously had—to work in my heart some new grace which has never been there before.

Knowing

Paul was no agnostic, he was a "knowing" man, and all God's people ought to be the same. They are a very dogmatic people when they are what they ought to be; they have nothing to do with "ifs", and "ands", and "buts", and "peradventures"; but they believe and are sure—

That tribulation worketh patience;

Naturally it is not so. Tribulation worketh impatience, and impatience misses the fruit of experience, and sours into hopelessness. Ask many who have buried a dear child, or have lost their wealth, or have suffered pain of body, and they will tell you that the natural result of affliction is to produce irritation against providence, rebellion against God, questioning, unbelief, petulance, and all sorts of evils. But what a wonderful alteration takes place when the heart is renewed by the Holy Spirit! Then, but not till then, tribulation worketh patience.

4. *And patience, experience; and experience, hope*

Then, further Paul says, "and experience, hope." Our experience of the Lord's goodness in the past leads us on to hope for still greater things in the future and, thus, experience worketh hope. I have seen some persons, who were called experienced Christians, in whom it seemed to me that experience had worked despair; for their faces were always very long and very sad, and their speech was as dolorous as it well could be. But here I find that true Christian experience worketh hope—a hope that maketh not ashamed.

5. *And hope maketh, not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*

If you have the Holy Ghost given unto you, then the love of God fills your

nature like a sweet perfume. As when the woman broke the alabaster box, and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment, so, when the Spirit of God comes, and brings the broken alabaster of the Savior's sacrifice, and we feel the love of God poured out among us, what a delightful perfume there is! " The way to make us love God is for the love of God to be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

Observe that no one can shed abroad the love of God in the heart but the Holy Ghost. It is he that first puts it there. Men live in neglect of this love till he first impresses them with a sense of the value of it; and they continue to seek after it in vain till he opens the door and introduces them into the secret chamber of its mystery. No man can say that Jesus is the Christ but by the Holy Ghost, much less can a man be assumed that he is the object of eternal love but by a revelation made to him by the Holy Spirit who makes this delightful truth clear to his mind.

6. *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.*

This is one of the most surprising sentences on record. If it had not been inspired, there are many who would cavil at it. Indeed, many do cavil at it even now, for it is still currently believed that Christ must have died for the righteous. Yet thus is it written: "In due time Christ died for the ungodly."

That was our character. There was no good point about us. We were ungodly and we had no strength to mend ourselves or to be other than ungodly. The strength for reformation had all gone. The strength for regeneration we never had. We were without strength, and then Christ died for us—died for the ungodly. He did not regard us as saints, but as actually ungodly, when he died for our redemption. It was not man's righteousness that brought Christ from heaven; but man's sin, and the infinite pity of God.

7. *For scarcely for a righteous man will one die:*

Though he were as just as Aristides, though be were renowned for justice, nobody would die for him. There is no such attraction in the virtue as would win anyone's love, so as to die for the man who displays it.

Yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.

For a benevolent, large-hearted, kindly-disposed man some might dare to die. Such a thing is not likely; but it is possible.

8. *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

We were without any attraction, without any righteousness, without any goodness, yet Christ loved us. Out of the graciousness of his own heart he loved us, according to that text, "I will love them freely."

And that is the glory of his love. While we were rebels against his government, he redeemed us. While we were far off from him by wicked works he sent his Son to die and bring us near. Free grace, indeed, was this—not caused by anything in us, but springing freely from the great heart of God.

9. *Much more then,*

See how the apostle, when he had uttered a great truth, proceeds to say, something greater still. Just before, he had written, "And not only so," and now he says, "Much more then,"

Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

This is a fine piece of argument, and strictly logical. If, when we were sinners, Christ died for us, will he let us be condemned now that he has washed us in his precious blood? Is it possible that, after dying for us, he will let us fall from grace, and perish after all? That will never be. Notice the same kind of argument again—

10. *For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*

There is a threefold argument here. If Christ died for us when we were his enemies, will he not save us now that we are his friends? If he died to reconcile us to God, will he not completely save us now that this great work has been accomplished? And as we were reconciled to God by Christ's death, shall we not much more be saved by his life? There are three arguments, and each one is sound and conclusive. The believer in Jesus must be eternally saved. If Christ died for sinners, what will he not do for believers, who are no longer enemies, but are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son?

11. *And not only so,*

Paul seems to go up a ladder, and when he gets to the top of it, he sets up another on the top of that one, and proceeds to mount that. This is the second time that we have read, "And not only so,"—

But we also joy in God

That is a delightful experience, joying in God himself, in the very character and person of God. So perfectly reconciled are we that, not only do we rejoice in God's gifts, and in his mercy; but we swim in a sea of delight in God himself.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Every blessing comes to us through him. How Paul delights to harp upon that string! He says continually, "through our Lord Jesus Christ,"—

By whom we have now received the atonement.

Christ has made atonement for us, and God has accepted that atonement on our behalf. We also have received it ourselves and now we are glad in God—glad that there is a God, glad that there is such a God, and glad that he is our God and Father in Christ Jesus.

12. *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:*

It was by one man's sin that we all fell through the first Adam. Does anyone object to the justice of that? I pray you, do not object to what is your only hope. If you and I had each one sinned for himself or herself apart from Adam, our case would probably have been hopeless, like the case of the fallen angels, who sinned individually, and fell never to be set up again, but inasmuch as we fell representatively in Adam, it prepared the way for us to rise representatively in the second Adam, Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. As I fell by another, I can rise by another; as my ruin was caused by the first man, Adam, my restoration can be brought about by the second Man, the Lord from heaven.

13,14. *For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.*

Infants die, although they have never sinned; they die, because death is the penalty of sin; and as they die for faults not their own, so are the saved by righteousness not their own. They die, for Adam sinned; they live, for Jesus died.

15–17. *But not as the offense, so also is the free gift. For if through the offense of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification. For if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)*

Adam's fall was terribly effectual, it has brought death upon the human race age after age; and Christ's death is wonderfully effectual, for on behalf of all those for whom he died his atonement so prevail as to put their sins away for ever.

18. *Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came*

upon all men unto justification of life.

That is to say, upon the "all" who are in Christ, as the condemnation came upon the "all" who were in the first Adam. He who believeth not in Jesus has no part in "the free gift unto justification of life;" but he who believeth is a partaker of the glorious justification which comes by Christ.

19. *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*

That is the wonderful doctrine of "the gospel of Christ." It is rejected in these evil days; they call it simple, and I know not what beside; but here it is put as plainly as words can put it, "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

20. *Moreover the law entered, that the offense might abound.*

Just as, sometimes, a physician may give a medicine which causes the disease to be more fully developed in order to its ultimate cure, so does the law make a discovery of our sin to us, and it also excites us to greater sin, by reason of the enmity of our nature, which is opposed to the law of God, and becomes the more active the more clearly the law is known, even as Paul says, further on in this Epistle, "I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."

It was the practical result of the giving of the law that men became greater sinners than they were before, and it was the design of the law that they should see themselves to be greater sinners than before. The law is the looking-glass in which we see our spots, but it is not the basin in which we wash them away. The law has a provoking power, for such is—the perversity of our nature that, no sooner do we hear the command, "You shall not do so-and-so," than at once we want to do it.

Our nature is very much like quicklime. Throw cold water upon it, and straightway it generateth heat; acting, as it were, against the nature of that which is cast upon it. So, the more God says to a man, "Thou shalt," the more the man says, "I will not;" and the more God says to him, "Thou shalt not," the more doth the man resolve that he will. "The law entered, that the offense might

abound." It reveals the depravity and disobedience of human nature, and lays us low before God as convicted criminals.

But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

There was more grace than terror even in the law. It has served a gracious purpose, for it was given to make us realize our guilt, and so might drive us to seek the grace of God for its forgiveness. Salvation is all of grace. Sin cannot conquer grace; it has had a hard struggle for it, but grace will ultimately win the victory in all who believe in Jesus. Sin may be a river, but grace is an ocean. Sin may be a mountain, but grace is like Noah's flood, which prevailed over the tops of the mountains fifteen cubits upward.

21. *That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Just as sin has reigned, and with despotic and irresistible power has ground his subjects in the very dust, and then cast them into the flames, so doth grace with irresistible goodness, constrain the chosen multitude to yield obedience, and thus prepares them for eternal bliss. See it lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, and makes him to sit among princes. Mark its shining course, and behold it blessing the sons of man wherever it stretches out its silver scepter, chasing away the misery of night, and giving the gladsomeness of gospel day; sending back the fiends of discord and of cruelty to the dens from which they once escaped, and bidding the angels of mercy keep perpetual watch and ward over the sons of Adam who have given themselves up to its sway of the kingdom of grace.

Romans 6

1. *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*

This seems to be a very plausible temptation, it is one which frequently came in the apostle's way, and therefore he very often had to denounce it.

It is one of the vilest suggestions of Satan that could possibly come to men. If the sinfulness of man has really given an opportunity for the display of divine mercy, then the devil's logic would be, "Let us commit more sin, that there may be more room for grace to work." But Christians have learned their reasoning in another school, and to such diabolical arguments they answer in the words of the apostle—

2. *God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*

The whole spirit of the gospel is opposed to the idea of sinning because God is gracious. It is a horrible Satanic suggestion—"As pardon can be so easily obtained from God, let us sin the more against him." The bare suggestion is utterly degrading and diabolical. It is to be scouted at once.

The two terms are exactly opposite to one another. If, through grace, we are dead to sin, how can we live in it? If, sinners as we are, we come to Christ to be saved from sin, then it would be a complete misuse of language to talk of being saved from sin, yet still to continue in it. Besides, the apostle goes on to show that the ordinance, by which believers in Jesus are to be admitted into the visible Christian Church will not suffer them to continue in sin.

3. *Know ye not, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?*

If we are in Christ at all, we are partakers of his death; and as his was a death for sin and a death to sin, we are made partakers of it; we are really dead because Christ died, and we are in him. Therefore we are dead to the old life, to the old way of sin. We signify that by our baptism. Was not that the real meaning of our baptism? Had it any meaning whatever unless we were really dead with Christ and therefore were buried with him?

4. *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even as we also should walk in newness of life.*

Our baptism, solemn as it was, was a great acted falsehood, a living pretense, unless we are dead to our former way of living, and have come to live unto God in a new life altogether, by virtue of the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

There is a parallel between Christ and the true Christian. There is a likeness between the Head of the Church and the members of his mystical body. Christ died, and was buried, and his people are reckoned as dead and buried in him.

5. *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:*

If we have partaken of his death, we partake also of his rising power. We live because he lives, and we live as he lives, not after the old manner, but in newness of life.

6. *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*

God has driven the nails through the active powers of our sin, both hands and feet are fastened to the cross of Christ, and though the heart and the head may sometimes wander, yet our old man is crucified with Christ that the body of sin

may be destroyed; and we are looking forward to that happy day when the old man shall be dead altogether, and we shall be made meet to enter into the inheritance of the saints in light. We believe that our old man will never die until we die, but we thank God that the death of our body will be also the death of the body of sin.

We are to regard ourselves as persons that have been dead. We are ourselves, it is true; and yet in another sense we are not our own selves. We are not to look upon ourselves as though we owed any kind of service to the power which we obeyed before we knew the Lord. We are new people, we have got a new life, and have entered upon a new existence—the old man is crucified with him.

7. *For he that is dead is freed from sin.*

That is, he that died to sin when Christ died is free from sin's condemning power. He can no longer live in it, for he is dead; and if we are really dead in Christ, we can no longer live in sin as we were wont to do.

8. *Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him:*

There was no getting free from the power of sin, except by dying to it; but, being dead to it, we are free from it; and, now being dead that way, we have entered into a new life that we might live as Christ lives.

9. *Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.*

So we, being raised from our former death, shall die no more; death hath no more dominion over us. That is to say, sin cannot reign in us again; we are dead to it, we are brought into a new life that can never end, even as our Lord Jesus Christ is. There is a parallel between us and Christ, even as there is a union between us.

10. *For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he*

liveth unto God.

The parallel between Christ and Christians comes up again. As Christ died, and was buried, and rose from the dead and now lives to die no more, so is it with us who believe in him, and are in him by a vital union. In him we died, and in him we rose, and in him we now live in newness of life.

11. *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

If Christ could die again, then believers might lose their spiritual life, and there might be such a thing as falling from grace; but while Jesus lies, no member of his mystical body can die. His own promise is "Because I live ye shall live also." He died unto sin once; we do the same. He lives no more to die; we also do the same. Highly privileged are they who are dead with Christ, and blessed is that ordinance in which we set forth our death and burial with him.

12. *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.*

It is in the body that it tries to reign. These poor things, these mortal frames of ours, have so many passions, so many desires, so many weaknesses, all of which are apt to bring us under the dominion of sin, unless we watch with great care.

13. *Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.*

"Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin"—neither eyes, nor ears, nor hands, nor feet, neither suffer any of these to become the tools of sin, "but yield yourselves unto God." He is ready to use you, lay all the powers of your nature out as tools, for him to use. "Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead." He is not the God of the dead; he cannot use the dead, but he is the God of the living, and as you profess to have

received a new life in Christ, yield up all the faculties of this new life unto the living God, “and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”

14. *For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*

While you were under the law, and simply heard it command you to do your duty, the command seemed to awaken all the hostility of your nature so that you remained under the dominion of sin, but now no longer does the law speak to you as it did aforetime. You are not now under the law, but another principle governs you. The grace, the favor, the love which God has shown to you in Christ Jesus, appeals to your heart, and you cheerfully yield to it the obedience which, when the law demanded it, your unregenerate spirit refused to render.

15. *What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.*

Again the apostle is shocked at such a suggestion. There are some who have denied that the law was binding upon them in any sense, and who have therefore claimed liberty to sin, but they can find no footing anywhere within the saved enclosure of God’s Word.

16. *Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?*

If, then, a man lives a life of sin, he proves that he is the servant of sin, for he has obeyed its commands, and let that man know assuredly that he has nothing to do with Christ while he is living in sin. But if a man lives in obedience to Christ and seeks after righteousness, and true holiness, that man is evidently the servant of righteousness, and so the servant of God.

17. *But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.*

God has taken you, melted you down, and poured you into a new mold. God be thanked for that; you are not what you used to be. Although you are not what you hope to be, yet you have reason to bless God you are not what once you were—you have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine into which you were delivered.

18. *Being then made free from sin,*

Is not that a glorious sentence, “Being then made free from sin”? Yes, the fetters are all gone; we have put up our feet upon the block, and the chains have been knocked off; we have put our hands down, and the irons have been broken in pieces. Free from sin! ’Tis true that sin still tempts us, but it cannot prevail against us; it tries to put the bit in our mouth, and to ride us as once it did, but we no longer submit to its sway. Sin is now an enemy to fret and worry us, but not a king to trample upon us, and rule over us.

Ye became the servants of righteousness.

We are the Lord’s free men, and out of gratitude for this glorious freedom, we become the willing servants of the righteous God.

19. *I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanliness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.*

In the days of our sin, we sinned with all our power. There was not one part of us but what became the willing servant of sin: and we went from iniquity into iniquity, and now the Cross has made us entirely new, and we have been melted down, poured out into a fresh mold. Now, let us yield every member of our body, soul, and spirit to righteousness, even unto holiness, till the whole of us, in the wholeness and consequently the holiness of our nature, shall be given unto God.

20. *For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.*

You did not care about righteousness then. When you served sin you felt it was utterly indifferent to you what the claims of righteousness might be.

Well, now that you have become the servant of righteousness, be free from sin, let sin have no more dominion over you now, than righteousness used to have when you were the slaves of sin.

21. *What fruit had ye then in these things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of these things is death.*

You had such pleasure as sin could give you, but was it worth having? You derived some profit, perhaps, from evil pursuits; but did the profit ever make up for the loss which you thereby sustained? O ye who have had experience of sin to the full, has it, after all, turned out to be the fair and lovely thing that it once seemed to be? No, the serpent had azure scales, but its fangs have poured poison into your blood. It came to you with all manner of deceivableness of unrighteousness, like Jezebel with her painted face, but it has wrought for you nothing but sorrow and suffering, and it will work your eternal ruin unless God, in his great mercy, shall prevent it.

22. *But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.*

Oh, what wondrous changes the grace of God works! “But now.” Paul must have rejoiced to write those two words. He had dwelt upon what men were before the Lord began to deal with them in mercy, “but now” he could say, “being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.”

23. *For the wages of sin is death;*

The apostle has in his mind’s eye the figure of a soldier receiving his pay. Sin, the captain, pays his hired soldiers a dreadful wage. The original word signifies “rations,” or some translate it “stipend.” It means the payment which soldiers receive, put in the plural as wages, because pay can be given in different forms: soldiers might be paid in meat, or in meal, or in money, or in part by their

clothing, or by lands promised when the time of service came to an end. Now that which sin, the grim captain, pays to those who are under him, is comprehended in this terrible term “death.”

Death is sin’s due reward, and it must be paid. A master employs a man, and it is due to that man that he should receive his wages. It his master did not pay him his wages, it would be an act of gross injustice. Now, if sin did not bring upon man death and misery, it would be an injustice. It is necessary for the very standing of the universe that sin should be punished. It must be so.

But the gift of God

Note well the change: death is a wage, but life is a gift. Sin brings its natural consequences with it; but eternal life is not the purchase of human merit, but the free gift of the love of God. It is with clear intent to teach us the doctrine of the grace of God that the apostle altered the word here from wages to gift. Naturally he would have said, “The wages of sin is death, but the wages of righteousness is eternal life.” But he wished to show us that life comes upon quite a different principle from that upon which death comes. In salvation all is of free gift: in damnation everything is of justice and desert. When a man is lost, he has earned it; when a man is saved, it is given him.

Is eternal life

The gift of the eternal God is eternal life. Those who talk about a man having everlasting life, and losing it, do not know the force of language. If a man has eternal life, it is eternal, and cannot therefore end or be lost. If it be everlasting, it is “everlasting”; to lose it would prove that it was not everlasting. No, if you have eternal life, you can never perish; if God has bestowed it upon you, it will not be recalled, “for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.”

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We are in everlasting union with the blessed Person of the Son of God, and therefore we live. To be in Christ is a mystery of bliss.

The apostle felt that this was an occasion for again rehearsing our blessed

Master’s names and titles of honor—“in Jesus Christ our Lord.” At certain seasons, the various honors and titles of great men are proclaimed by heralds with becoming state, and so here, to the praise of the Lord Jesus, Paul writes his full degree—“Eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.” He writes at large the august name before which every knee shall bow, and he links our life therewith.

Here we read the cheering and precious name of Jesus. By that name he is nearest to man; when he was born into our nature he was named Jesus, “for he shall save his people from their sins.” The life which comes in connection with him is salvation from sin. In this Savior is life.

Romans 7

1–3. *Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress, but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.*

He merely states this as an illustration.

4. *Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*

While we were under the law, we could not come into the bonds of the new covenant—the covenant of grace. But, through the death of Christ, we are dead to the law, and therefore we are set free from the principle and covenant of law, and we have come under the covenant of grace.

This union with Christ is often mentioned in Scripture under the form of a marriage, but it is also described under other symbols: we are one with Christ as a branch is one with the vine, as a stone is one with the foundation, and especially as a member of the body is one with the head. Now it is not possible if I am a member of Christ that I should be under condemnation until he is condemned. Is my head acquitted? Then my hand is acquitted. So long as a man’s head is above water you cannot drown his feet; and as long as Christ, the Head of the mystical body, rises above the torrent of condemnation, there is no

condemning even the least and feeblest member of his body.

5. *For when we were in the flesh,*

When we were in an unrenewed depraved state.

The motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

Sin is the transgression of the law. Therefore, out of the law, by reason of our corruption, springs sin. And, in our past lives, we did indeed find sin to be very fruitful. It grew very fast in our members, and it brought forth much "fruit unto death."

6. *But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.*

No longer is the message to us, "This do, and thou shalt live." No more are we slaves under bondage; but we have come into a new state, we are free, rejoicing in the glorious liberty of the children of God; and what we now do is done out of a spirit of love, and not of fear. We are not seeking after holiness in order to be saved by it, neither do we seek to escape from sin because we are under any fear of being cast into hell. We have another spirit altogether within us. Blessed are they who are enjoying the liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free, and who therefore come boldly right up to the throne of grace.

7. *What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid.*

Nay, so far from being sin, the law is the great detective of sin, discovering it, and letting us know what sin really is.

Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.

There are some who hope to overcome their evil propensities by the law. They think that if they can know and feel the authority of the law of God, that will have an awe over their minds, and they shall become holy. Now the law is in itself supremely holy. It cannot be improved. We could not add to it, or take from it without injuring it. It is a perfect law. But what is its effect upon the mind? When it comes into an unrenewed mind, instead of checking sin, it causes sin. The apostle says that he not known lust, except the law had said, “Thou shalt not covet.” There is a something about us which rebels against law the moment we come to it. There are some things we should never think of doing if we were not prohibited from them, and then there becomes a tendency at once in this vile nature of ours to break the law.

8. *But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence.*

This is Paul’s own account of his inward conflicts. He longed to conquer sin. He wanted to become a free man, and live always a godly and holy life, but he found that there was a battle within his nature.

For without the law sin was dead.

If there had never been any law, there could not have been any sin, because sin is a breaking of law. The law is good. We are not speaking about that. The law is necessary, but, still such is our nature that the very existence of law argues and creates the existence of sin. And when the law comes, then sin comes immediately. “Without the law sin was dead.”

9. *For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*

“I did not know how sinful I was until God’s commandment came to me. Sin seemed to be dead within me, and I thought myself a righteous man; but when the law of God came home to my heart and conscience, and I understood that even a sinful thought would ruin me, that a hasty word had the essence of murder in it, and that the utmost uncleanness might lurk under the cover of what seemed a mere custom of my fellow-men—when I found out all this, sin did

indeed live, but I died so far as righteousness was concerned."

10–13. *And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid.*

"If I sinned the more when God's commandment was revealed to me; and if, by the light of the law, sin was made more apparent to me, and became so exceeding sinful that it drove me to despair, and so to commit still worse sin; the fault was not in the law, but in sin, and in me, the sinner."

But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

There was sin in his nature, but he did not know it. But when the commandment came, then that evil nature said, "I won't keep that commandment," and it took occasion at once to show itself by breaking that commandment.

It was something like a medicine which many a wise physician has given to his patient. There is a deadly disease in the internals of the man, and he gives him a medicine that throws it out. You see it on the skin. You feel the pain of it. It would have been his death anyhow. It can only be his death now; but now it is a part of the process of the cure to bring the disease where it can be seen.

And so the law comes into a man's heart, and because of the rebellion of his nature, he kicks against the law and sins. It does not make him sinful. It only shows that he was sinful, for a perfect law would not make a perfect man sin. It would lead and guide him in the way of holiness.

But a perfect law coming into contact with an imperfect nature soon creates rebellion and sin. You may preach up the law of God till everybody becomes worse than he was before. You may read the ten commandments till men learn what to do in order to provoke God. The law does not create holiness. It never can.

14. *For we know that the law is spiritual:*

The law of the Lord is a far higher thing than it seems to be in the esteem of many people. Talk not of it as a mere “decalogue.” It has far-reaching hands, and it affects the secret thoughts and purposes of men, and even their stray imaginations come under its supremacy. “The law is spiritual.”

But I am carnal, sold under sin.

“I am carnal.” There is the source of all the mischief—a disobedient and rebellious subject, not an irksome law. The law is good enough, it is absolutely perfect; “but,” says the apostle, “I am carnal,”—fleshly—“sold under sin.”

15. *For that which I do I allow not:*

The man himself does that which is evil, but his conscience revolts against it.

For what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

This is a strange contradiction—a man who has grace enough to will to do good, and yet does it not. There are two men in the one man—the new nature struggling against the old nature. This must be a renewed man who talks in this fashion, or else he could not say that he hated sin; yet there must be a part of him still imperfect, or else he would not do that which he hates.

This is the believer’s riddle. To say that this is not a believer’s experience is to prove that the man who says it does not know much about how believers feel. We hate sin, and yet, alas! alas! we fall into it! We would live perfect lives if we could, we that are renewed. We make no justification for our sin: it is evil and abominable; yet do we find these two things warring and fighting within.

16. *If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.*

My inmost heart, says the law, is good, though I have not kept it as I wish I had,

yet my very wish to keep it is the consent of my nature to goodness of that law, and proves that there is a vitality about me which will yet throw out the disease, and make me right in the sight of God.

17. *Now then it is no more I that do it,*

The real "I," the true "I," the new-born "ego."

But sin that dwelleth in me.

The renewed man still stands out against sin. His heart is not wishful to sin, but that old nature within him will sin even to the end. I would be earnest in prayer, and my thoughts are distracted. I would love God with all my heart, and something else comes in and steals away a part of it. I would be holy as God is holy, but I find myself falling short of my desires. So the apostle means.

18, 19. *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.*

Oh, how often have men, who have been struggling after holiness, had to use these words of the apostle! The more holy they become, the more they realize that there is still a something better beyond them, after which they struggle, but to which they cannot yet attain; so still they cry, "The good that we would we do not: but the evil which we would not, that we do."

20. *Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*

The true man—the newborn man—is struggling after that which is right. The real "I", the immortal "ego", is still pressing forward, like a ship beating up against wind and tide, and striving to reach the harbor where it shall find perfect rest.

Oh, what struggles, what contentions, what rightings, there are within the men and women in whom the grace of God is working mightily! Those who have but little grace can take things easily, and swim with the current; but where grace is mighty, sin will fight for the mastery, though it must yield ultimately, for there can never be any true peace until it is subdued.

Oh! this accursed indwelling sin! Would God it were driven out. We do not say this to excuse ourselves-God forbid—but to blame ourselves that we permit this sin to dwell within us. Yet must we rejoice in God that we are born again, and that this new "I" the true "I," will not yield to sin, but fights against it.

21. *I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.*

Speaking for myself, I can say that, often, when I am most earnest in prayer, stray thoughts will come into my mind to draw me off from the holy work of supplication; and when I am most intently aiming at humility, then the shadow of pride falls upon me. Do not gracious men generally find it so? If their experience is like that of the apostle Paul, or like that of many another child of God whose biography one delights to read, it is so, and it will be so.

22. *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:*

Possessing now an interest in Christ, knowing that my sins are forgiven me for his name's sake, the one thing I desire beyond everything else is to be perfectly free from sin, and to lead an unblemished life without sin of omission or sin of commission. Now, every Christian that has that desire within his soul will never be satisfied until that desire is fulfilled; and this shows that we delight in the law of God after the inward man

23. *But I see another law in my members,*

There is within our nature that which would send the best saint to hell if sovereign grace did not prevent. There is a little hell within the heart of every child and only the great God of heaven can overmaster that mischievous indwelling sin.

Warring against the law of my mind,

Darkness, by itself, will go on comfortably enough; but when the Lord sends in light, there will be a conflict—a terrible conflict too—and you will find your own self divided into camps; you will find both Cain and Abel in your heart, Egyptians and Israelites in your soul, and if there be a David in your heart, there will be a Saul too.

These two natures will never cease to struggle so long as we are in this world. The old nature will never give up; it will never cry truce, it will never ask for a treaty to be made between the two. It will always strike as often as it can. When it lies still it will only be preparing for some future battle.

And bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

I think the apostle was not referring here to acts of gross misdemeanor having brought him into captivity so far as he himself was concerned; though many who are God's children, get into sorry captivity because the law of sin and death in their members gets the mastery over them sometimes.

I think this law of sin brings us unto captivity in other respects. While you are fighting and contending against inbred sin doubts will invade your heart. "Am I a child of God?" If it be so, why am I thus? I cannot pray as I would. Surely if I were a child of God I should not be hampered in devotion or go out to a place of worship and feel I have no enjoyment, while others feast and sing for joy of heart." Oh, what a captivity the soul is brought into when it allows inbred sin to cast any doubts upon its safety in Christ.

The child of God has written bitter things against himself and signed his own death warrant. Thank God, if we sign our own death warrant it does not stand for anything. Nobody can sign that but the King, and he will never sign it for any soul that believes in him, however feeble his love may be. We may be brought into captivity by a sense of sin, a temptation to sin, or a yielding to sin. If we ever come to that it will make us weak in serving, cold in prayers when alone, and joyless in the society of the saints; nay, shall feel almost lifeless.

24. *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

These are birth-pangs, the throes and anguish of a regenerated spirit. The Christian man is fighting his way to sure and certain victory; so, the more of this wretchedness that he feels, the better, if it be only caused by a consciousness that sin is still lurking within him, and that he longs to be rid of it.

Now, the more holy a man gets the more he cries in this fashion. While he is low down in the scale, he puts up with sin, and he is uneasy, but when he gets to see Christ and get somewhat like him, the more nearly he approximates to the image of his Master, the more the presence of the least sinful thought is horrifying to him. He would, if he could, never look on sin again—never have the slightest inclination to it, but he finds his heart getting abroad and wandering when he would tether it down, if he could, to the cross and crucify it there.

And so the more happy he is in Christ the more desperately does he cry against the wretchedness of being-touched with sin, even in the least degree. “Oh! wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

25. *I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

What a mercy it is that the Lord Jesus has struck a deadly blow at our sin. He has broken the head of it. It is a monster, and has immense vitality; but it is a broken-backed, broken-legged, broken-headed monster. There it is; it lies hissing and spitting, and writhing, capable of doing us much mischief, but he that has wounded it will smite it again and again, until at last it shall utterly die.

So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Some have imagined that the old nature is turned out of the Christian: not so, for the Word of God and experience teach the contrary, the old nature is in the Christian unchanged, unaltered, just the same, as bad as ever it was; while the new nature in him is holy, pure and heavenly.

Men who only believe their depravity, but do not hate it, are no further than the

devil on the road to heaven. It is not my being corrupt that proves me a Christian, nor knowing I am corrupt, but that I hate my corruption. It is my agonizing death struggle with my corruptions that proves me to be a living child of God.

Romans 8

Some people talk about “getting out of the 7th chapter, into the 8th.” But who made this into an eighth chapter? Certainly, the Holy Spirit did not. There are no chapters in the Epistle as he inspired Paul to write it, the whole of it runs straight on without a break: “Therein therefore now no condemnation”—while struggling, fighting, warring, contending—

1. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,*

“No condemnation”: that is the beginning of the chapter. No separation: that is the end of the chapter. And all between is full of grace and truth. What a banquet this chapter has often proved to the souls of God’s hungry servants! May it be so now as we read it.

No condemnation even now. Many doubts, but no condemnation. Many chastisements, but no condemnation. Even frowns from the Father’s face apparently, but no condemnation. And this is not a bare statement, but an inference from powerful arguments.

There is no condemnation; that is gone, and gone for ever. Not only is part of it removed, but the whole of it is gone: “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” This is their legal status before God—in Christ Jesus, without condemnation; and this is their character:

Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

This is the distinctive mark of a man in Christ Jesus. He does not let the flesh govern him, but the Spirit. The spiritual nature has come to the front, and the flesh must go to the back. The Spirit of the living God has entered into him, and

become the master-power of his life. He walks “not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

2. *For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

“Hath made me free”—that is, the real “I” of which he wrote a little while before—the true man himself: “‘The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.’ I have broken its bonds, I am a free man. Contending against its usurpation, I have escaped from under its yoke, and I shall yet tread sin under my feet, and God shall bruise even Satan himself under my feet shortly.”

Sin and death cannot govern me—cannot condemn me—cannot destroy me. Another law has come in. The Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has brought me into another kingdom wherein I cannot be affected, so as to condemn me, by the law of sin and death. I am not the bond-slave of it; I am the enemy of it; I am free from it, fighting against it, struggling like a free man against one who would bring him into captivity; but even though I sometime feel as if I were a captive, I know I am not, I am free.

Dr. Chalmers has a remarkable sermon upon “The Expulsive Power of a New Affection;” and it is this new affection for Christ, which is the accompaniment of the new life in Christ, which expels the old forces that used to hold us under bondage to sin and death.

3. *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,*

The law of God was a good law, a just and holy law. It was weak, not in itself, for, verily, if righteousness could have been by any law, it would have been by the law of God. But it was weak through our flesh. We could not keep it. We could not fulfill the conditions of life laid down under it.

The law never made anybody holy, and it never will do so. The law says to a man, “This is what you ought to do, and you will be condemned if you do not do it.” That is quite true, but the law supplies no power to enable us to do this. It

says to the lame man, “You must walk,” and to the blind man, “You must see; “but it does not enable them either to walk or to see.

On the contrary, our nature is such that, when the law issues its commands, there is a tendency in us at once to disobey them. There are some sins, which we never should have thought of committing if we had not been commanded not to do them, so that the law—not because of its own nature, but because of the wickedness of our nature, is weak and ineffectual for the producing of righteousness.

God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

Therefore, what the law could not do, God has now done for us. He has found a way of making us righteous through the righteousness of his own dear Son, whom he has sent in the likeness of sinful flesh. He has found out a way of condemning sin, without condemning us. He condemned sin in the flesh, but we escaped. And he has found out a way of making us practically righteous, too, through the abundance of his grace —

4. *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us,*

None keep the law so well as those who do not hope to be saved by it, but who, renouncing all confidence in their own works, and accepting the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ Jesus, are moved by gratitude to a height of consecration and a purity of obedience which mere legalism can never know. The child will obey better without desire of reward, than the slave will under the dread of the lash, or in hope of a wage. The most potent motive for holiness is free grace. A dying Savior is the death of sin. We strove against its power until we learnt that Christ was the way, and then we conquered it.

Who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

Mark, again, how Paul brings us to this as the great evidence of our being in Christ Jesus—the not walking after the flesh. Now, every man, as he is born into the world, left to himself, is sure to “walk after the flesh.” It is only the man who

has the Spirit of God put into his soul, who has the heavenly gift from on high, who will “walk after the Spirit.” It is not talking after the flesh, but it is walking after it, that condemns us, and it is not talking after the Spirit that will save us, it is walking after the Spirit that is the evidence of salvation; not talking, but walking.

5. *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh;*

They care for nothing else: they are satisfied so long as their appetites are gratified. They are of this world, and the things of this world fill them to the brim. They live to eat and drink. They live for self-aggrandizement. They live for the world and its pleasures alone. It is according to their nature.

But they that are after the Spirit (do mind) the things of the Spirit.

Spiritual joys, spiritual hopes, spiritual pursuits—these belong only to those who are spiritual. Where the Holy Ghost is supreme where the spiritual world has become predominant over the heart and life. There, men live for something nobler than the worldly man’s trinity, “What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?” The carnal life is only becoming to a beast, or a bird, or an insect. But when a man cares for his immortal spirit, and lives for divine and spiritual things, he has attained to the life that is life indeed.

Everything according to its nature. Water will rise as high as its source, but it will not naturally flow any higher. The great thing, then, is to be brought under the dominion of the Holy Spirit, and of that new nature which is the offspring of the Spirit. Then we try to rise up to our source, and we rise vastly nigher than human nature ever can under any force that you can apply to it. The new nature can do what the old nature cannot do.

6. *For to be carnally minded*

To have the mind of the flesh.

Is death;

That is what it comes to, for the flesh comes to death at last, and, after death, it goes to corruption, If we live after that carnal fashion, this will be the end of our living: “death.”

But to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

For the spirit will never die, and the spirit has that within it which will bring it perfect peace.

7. *Because the careful mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*

The old nature never will obey the law of God; it never can do so. What then is to be done with it? Improve it? Nay, my brethren, the only thing to be done with it is to let it die, and then to bury it. In baptism you have a most significant symbol of what is to be done with the flesh; you are to treat it as a dead thing, and therefore to bury it. Let the old life be crucified and put to death with Christ, and let the new life take its place.

The opponents of the free-grace gospel, which it is our delight to preach, assert that men can be saved, if they will, and that men most certainly can repent, and can believe, and can come to God of their own free will, and that it is not through any defect in any powers that they have if they are not saved. Now, we are not over prone to controvert that point; but, at the same time, we do not understand the meaning of this verse if what they say is correct. It says here, “The carnal mind is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Some say that men could repent if it were their inclination. Exactly so; but that is what we assert—that it never will be and never can be their inclination, except they are constrained to do so by the grace of God.

Rowland Hill uses a very singular and odd metaphor in his “Village Dialogues.” Two parties are speaking together on this subject, and one of them, pointing to the cat sitting on the hearth says, “Do you see that cat? She sits there, and licks her paws, and washes herself clean.” “I see that,” said the other. “Well,” said the first speaker, “did you ever hear of one of the hogs taken out of the sty that did so?” “No,” said he. “But he could if he liked,” said the other. Ah, verily, he could if he liked; but it is not according to his nature, and you never saw such a thing

done, and until you have changed the swine's nature, he cannot perform such a good action; and God's Word says the same of man.

8. *So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

So long as we are under the dominion of the old nature, the depraved and fallen nature, there is no pleasing God. Those that have never been born again, so as to be "in the Spirit," are still just as they were born "in the flesh," so they cannot please God. Do what they may, there is an essential impurity about their nature so that they cannot be well pleasing unto God. We must be born again, we must become spiritual by the new birth which is wrought by the Holy Spirit, or else it is impossible for us to please God. O you who are trying your best to please God apart from the new birth, and apart from Christ, see how this iron bar is put across your path: "they that are in the flesh cannot please God." Go then to him and ask him to give you of his Spirit, that you may be spiritual, and no longer carnal.

9. *But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.*

Oh! this is a very wonderful fact, that the Spirit of God should dwell in us. I never know which of two mysteries most to admire—God incarnate in Christ, or the Holy Spirit indwelling in man; they are two marvelous things, miracles of miracles.

Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

"Verily," says Christ, "I never knew you." "But, Lord, we ate and drank with thee: thou didst preach in our streets." But he says, "I never knew you." They are none of his. Oh! dear friends, the highest point to which human nature can reach of itself falls short of being in Christ. There must be the Spirit of God dwelling in us, or else we are none of his.

Christ does not own any that are not indwelt by his Spirit. They may wear the Christian name; they may perform some acts which look like Christian acts; but all this avails nothing. You must have the Spirit of God within you, or else you

are none of his; and what a thing it is to be “none of his.”

10. *And it Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin;*

The grace of God has not changed that body; it still remains earth, dust, worms’ meat, and it must die unless Christ should come, and transform it by his coming. “The body is dead because of sin;” and hence come those aches and pains, that heaviness, that weariness, that decay, those infirmities of age which we experience so long as we bear about with us this body of death.

But the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

The regeneration of the body, so to speak, is not performed in this life. Resurrection is tantamount to that. The body is still under the old law of death, and so we have pain and weakness, and we die; but the spirit, oh! how it triumphs, even in the midst of pain and weakness. “The Spirit is life, because of righteousness.” That will not die. There is a living power within us which triumphs over this dying, decaying body. So we rejoice notwithstanding all our afflictions, trials, and depressions.

11. *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*

So there is coming a time for your body to experience the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body. He does not say that he will give you a new body. Do not believe this modern doctrine. But he shall quicken your mortal body; that is to say, the same body, which is now subject to death, and so is mortal, is to be quickened at the resurrection.

So there is a complete deliverance provided for body, soul, and spirit. As Moses said to Pharaoh when he agreed to let the people of Israel go, but said that they must leave behind their flocks, “Not a hoof shall be left behind,” so no particle of our real manhood shall be left under the thraldom of sin and death. The soul is already emancipated, and the body shall be, by the Spirit which dwells in you.

12. *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.*

Certainly not, for we owe the flesh nothing. It keeps us down and hampers us, it is a hindrance to us, but we certainly owe it nothing; so let us not be subservient to it, let us not consult or even consider it, and especially let us never come under its fatal bondage. What do we owe the old nature? Nothing, surely. Give it a decent burial. Let it be buried with Christ in baptism. Let the Spirit of God come and renew it. But we owe it nothing, and we are not debtors to it.

13. *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die:*

If you live simply to gratify your ambition, if you live for avarice, if you live to please yourself, if you live for any earthly object which can be comprised under the term "after the flesh," you will certainly be disappointed, for you will die, and your hope will die with you.

But if ye through the spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

Shall a dying body, then, be my master? Shall the appetite for eating and drinking, or anything else that comes of the flesh, dominate my spirit? God forbid! Let death go to death, and the flesh is such; but the newly-given spirit of God, the spirit who has quickened us with immortal life shall rule and reign in us evermore.

If you seek, by the Holy Spirit's power, to kill sin, if you try to crush all sinful desires, if you keep evil with a rope about its neck, if you mortify it put it to death, then you shall live. Holiness is the mode of the Christian; life, sin is the way of the sinner's death.

14. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

Not those who say they are "the sons of God," but those who undoubtedly prove

that they are, by being led, influenced, gently guided, by the Spirit of God. There may be a great many weaknesses and infirmities about them, but if they follow the divine leadership of the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Your "universal fatherhood" is rubbish. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," and none others. This is the essential to sonship —that we should have the Spirit of God within us.

15. *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear:*

We did have it once, and it wrought some good effect upon us for the time being; when we were under the law, we felt ourselves to be in slavery, and that made us go to Christ for liberty.

But ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

The spirit of bondage is the spirit of servants, not of sons; but that servitude is ended for us who are made free in Christ Jesus. We are no longer afraid of being called the children of God. We are not afraid of our own Father; we have a filial fear of him, but it is so mixed with love that there is no torment in it. Whether Jew or Gentile, we cry, "Abba, Father."

I suppose that the apostle, when he thus spake and said, "we," felt so much of the spirit of adoption in his own bosom that he could not talk of it as belonging to others alone. He was obliged to include it thus', and so he puts it, "Ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father." He wanted to intimate that he himself also was a partaker of this blessed spirit. And woe to the preacher who can preach an adoption which he never enjoyed. Woe to any of us if we can teach to others concerning the spirit of sonship, but never feel it crying in our own souls, "Abba, Father."

Oh, blessed, blessed state of heart to feel that now we are born into the family of God, and that the choice word which no slave might ever pronounce may now be pronounced by us, "Abba"! It is a child's word, such as a little child utters when first he opens his mouth to speak, and it runs the same both backwards and forwards—AB-BA. Oh to have a childlike spirit that, in whatever state of heart I

am, I may still be able to say, in the accents even of spiritual infancy, “Abba, Father”!

16. *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:*

That is, when we have the Spirit, when we are renewed in the Spirit of our minds, when we come into the domain of Spirit, and quit the tyranny of the flesh. Then the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

He corroborates the testimony of conscience. We feel that we are the children of God; and the Spirit of God comes forward as a second, but still greater and higher witness, to confirm the testimony that we are the children of God.

17. *And if children, then heirs;*

It is not, of course, so in human families. All children are not heirs; but it is so in the family of God. For all God’s children are heirs, and all equally heirs. The elder-born members of God’s family, such as Abraham and the rest of the patriarchs, are no more heirs of God than are we of these latter days who have but lately come to Christ. “If children, then heirs.” Heirs of what?

Heirs of God,

Not only heirs of what God chooses to give, but heirs of himself. There need be nothing else said, if this is true: “The Lord is my portion, saith my soul.” “Heirs of God,

And joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Oh! this blessed co-partnership—this fellowship: joint-heirs with Christ: taking part in the whole heritage—as well the heritage of suffering as the heritage of glory. “It shall bruise thy heel, but thou shalt bruise his head.” There is to be the

heel-bruising for the Christ, as well as for us; but there is to be the head-crushing of sin and Satan for him and for us, too.

18. *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared*

Paul made “the sufferings of this present time” into a matter of simple arithmetic and careful reckoning. He added them all up, and saw what the total was, he seemed to be about to state a proportion sum, but he gave it up, and said that the sufferings were “not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.” Did they stand as one to a thousand? No, else they had been worthy to be compared. Did they stand as one to ten thousand—or one to a million—or one to a million of millions? If so, they would still have been worthy to be compared; but Paul saw that there was no proportion whatever between them. The sufferings seemed to be but as a single drop, and the glory to be as a boundless ocean.

With the glory which shall be revealed in us.

That glory is not yet fully revealed; it is revealed to us, but not yet in us. Glory in us! Only think of that! You know the revelation that is in the book; but how grand will be the revelation that is in the man! “The glory which shall be revealed in us.” We shall be full of glory. And a part of God’s glory, which otherwise must have lain concealed, will be revealed in his people to his own praise forever and ever; but also to our own eternal joy.

Do we suffer now? Then let us wait for something better that is yet to come. Yes, we do suffer, and in this we are in accord with the whole creation of God, for the-whole creation is just now, as it were, enduring birth pangs. There is something better coming; but, meanwhile, it is troubled and perplexed, moaning and groaning.

What, then, shall we do in the meantime? Why, wait with patience, and bear our appointed burden until the time comes for us to be relieved of it—wait, however, with hope—wait, too, as we must, quietly enduring the pains and pangs which precede so glorious a birth. In this respect, we are not alone, as the apostle goes on to say—

19. *For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the Sons of God.*

There is something that the whole creation is waiting for, and it cannot come, till God's children are manifested—till the glory is revealed in them. All creation is, as it were, watching and waiting on tip-toe for the day when God shall manifest his sons who are at present hidden. In due time, they shall come forth, acknowledged of God, and then shall the whole creation rejoice.

20, 21. *For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*

Everything here is blighted, and subject to storm, or to decay, or to sudden death, or to calamity of some sort. It is a fair world, but there is the shadow of the curse over it all. The slime of the serpent is on all our Edens now. "The creation itself was made subject to vanity," but it "also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."

We were in bondage, and we have come out in a measure into the liberty of the children of God. Now the world in which we live is in sympathy with us, and it is part under bondage because of sin, but it is only temporary bondage. There will come a day when the whole creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God—a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

22. *For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.*

See how it often weeps in the superabundant rain that seems like a minor deluge. Note how, at times, creation's very bowels seem to be tossed and torn with pain and agony by volcanoes and earthquakes. Mark the tempests, tornadoes, hurricanes, and all kinds of ills that sweep over the globe, leaving devastation in their track, and the globe itself is wrapped in swaddling bands of mist, and shines not out like its sister stars in its pristine brightness and splendor. The

animal creation, too, wears the yoke of bondage. How unnecessarily heavy have men often made that yoke!

23. *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*

Of course, we do groan within ourselves. Who said we did not? And those brethren who say they never groan, I wish they would learn better. It is one of the signs of grace and marks of a child of God that he is not perfect, and does not think he is, but groans after it, cries after it.

"We groan without ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." For this poor body still lies in measure under a curse, still with its pains, still with its carnal appetites and fleshly tendencies to hamper and to trouble it, but this we groan after—that this flesh of ours, and the whole creation in which we dwell, shall yet have a joyous deliverance.

The soul has obtained its redemption. Therefore, our heart is glad, and our glory rejoicing. But our body has not yet obtained its redemption. That is to come at the resurrection. Then will be the adoption. "Waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." Oh! blessed fact! Though now, in common with the whole creation, the body is subjected to bondages, yet it shall be delivered, and we—the whole man, body as well as soul and spirit—shall be brought into the liberty of the children of God.

24. *For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?*

Ah! brethren, if we could be all we should like to be, there would then be no room for the exercise of hope. If we had all that we are to have, then hope, which is one of the sweetest of the graces, would have no room in which to exercise herself.

It is a blessed thing to have hope. Though I have heard that faith and hope are not to be found in heaven, I very much question it. I do not think they will ever die. "Now abide these three—faith, hope, and love"; for in heaven there will be

room, surely, for trust in the ever blessed God that he will never cast us out from our blessedness—room for the expectation of the second advent—room for the expectation of the conquest of the world—room for the fulfilled promise of bringing all the elect to glory; still something to be hoped for; still something to be believed.

Yet here is the main sphere of hope, and therefore let us give it full scope; and when other graces seem to be at a non-plus, let us still hope.

25. *But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.*

What a lesson that is, and how seldom do we learn it! Oh! in this present state our main duty is, “Then do we with patience wait for it.” You want to have your cake and keep it, but you cannot eat it and keep it too. With patience wait for it.

There see some fruits of the earth that are not ripe yet. You lay them by in store, and there are many good things that God has laid by in store for his people, and he says to us, “With patience wait for it:”

Oh! but you world fain have heavenly joy on earthly ground. It would be a sorry misfit if it were so. But God keeps time and season, and there is harmony in his music. You shall have earthly sorrow on earthly ground, and you shall have heavenly bliss on the heavenly shore: but not till then.

We do with patience wait for it.

26. *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

Groanings, then, are prayers, and prayers which the Spirit of God most certainly hears. And those desires which altogether exhaust language, or which cannot be put into language by reason of the exhaustion of our sorrow, these are nevertheless heard of God, for the Spirit of God is in them.

I should have thought that it would have read, “But the Spirit itself teaches us

what we should pray for." But it does more than that. He goes beyond teaching us what we should pray for. He "maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered."

Do you know what those groanings are? I am afraid that those who never had groanings which cannot be uttered will never know anything of that glory which cannot be expressed, for that is the way to it. The groanings that cannot be uttered lead on to unutterable joy.

I think that if anywhere our infirmities come out, it is in prayer: even the strongest are, on their knees, comparatively weak. How few there are among us that prevail with God, as Elijah did! We ought to do so. We need, none of us, stop short of the fullest stature of a man in Christ Jesus, and a man of full stature in Christ would surely carry the keys of heaven's treasury at his girdle. He would have but to ask, and to receive—to seek and to find. May the Spirit help our infirmities.

27. *And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

When we ourselves hardly know the mind of the Spirit, he that searches all hearts knows it. When we feel as if we could not pray, yet the Spirit of God makes intercession in us, and the great Father reads the purport of the intercessions, and blesses us, not according to our knowledge of our own prayer, but according to his knowledge of what the Spirit means by those prayers. Have you never noticed that holy men of old sometimes spoke much greater things than they thought they should, for the Spirit of God in them spoke by them more than they themselves understood; and I believe that it is so in prayer. Oh! oftentimes the groaning, wrestling believer may have no inkling of the full purport of his own prayer, but he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

That is the whole process of prayer. The Spirit of God knows the will of the Father, and he comes and writes it on our hearts. A true prayer is the revelation of the Spirit of God to our heart, making us desire what God has appointed to give to us. Hence the success of prayer is no difficulty to the predestinarian.

Some foolishly say, “If God has ordained everything, what is the use of praying?” If God had not ordained everything, there would be no use in praying; but prayer is the shadow of the coming mercy which falls across the spirit, and we become in prayer in some degree gifted like the seers of old. The spirit of prophecy is upon the man who knows how to pray; the Spirit of God has moved him to ask for what God is about to give.

28. *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

That is a wonderfully positive statement, Paul. There are certain persons, nowadays, who say that we know nothing; yet the apostles constantly say, “We know this,” and “We know that.” These people tell us that there is a great distinction between believing and knowing—but, evidently, it is a distinction of which the inspired apostles knew nothing at all. Read the Epistles of John, and note how he continually says, “We know, we know, we know,” and how frequently he adds, “We believe,” as though believing and knowing were the same thing. Agnostics may declare that they know nothing, if they please; but, as for us who do know, because we believe what we are taught of God in this Book, we will speak He who has something to say has a right to say it; we know, and therefore we speak.

Mark, brethren, how the apostle speaks here; he does not say that all things shall work together for good; no, but that they do work together, they are now working for your present good. This is not merely something which shall eventually turn out right; it is all right now, “We know that all things are working together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” No sooner does the apostle mention that word “purpose” than he must needs found a long discourse upon it. He was not afraid or ashamed to speak of the purposes of God. There are some preachers who say nothing about God’s purpose, or God’s decree; they seem to be afraid of it, they say it is “Calvinistic doctrine.” Why, it was here, in the Scriptures, long before Calvin was born, so what right have they to call it by his name? Listen to what the apostle has to say:

29. *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born*

among many brethren.

This is their character, which they perceive, which others may in a measure perceive. We are to be like him then, conformed to his image; and if we be joint-heirs with him, what a joy it is that we are to be partakers of his nature, made like him! Christ will be reflected, and in a measure repeated, in all his people; and this shall be the very glory of heaven, that, look which way you will, you shall see either Christ himself or his likeness in his people. If you have ever stood in a room that was full of mirrors everywhere, how wonderfully your own likeness has been repeated! And heaven shall be a mirror chamber, wherein Christ shall be seen in every one of his people. He did predestinate them to be conformed to the image of his Son.

30. *Moreover whom he did predestinate; them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

Notice that personal pronoun "he"—how it comes at the beginning, and goes on to the end. "Salvation is of the Lord." This is so often forgotten that, trite as it may appear, we cannot repeat it too often: "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate, whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." You might suppose, from the talk of some men, that, salvation is all of the man himself—that is free agency pushed into a falsehood, a plain truth puffed into a lie. There is such a thing as free agency, and we should make a great mistake if we forgot it; but there is also such a thing as free grace, and we shall make a still greater mistake if we limit that to the agency of man; it is God who works our salvation from the beginning to the end.

No breaks between the links of this chain. Foreknowledge is welded to the predestination: the predestination is infallibly linked with the calling, the calling with the justification, and the justification with the glorification. There is no hint given that there may be a flaw or break in the series. Get a hold of any one, and you possess the whole. The called man is the predestinated man. Let him be sure of that. And the justified man shall be a glorified man. Let him have no doubt whatever about that.

That glorification we cannot see as yet. It is in the excessive brightness of the future, just as his divine election is in the brightness of the past. These are the two columns on either shore; but the swinging bridge in between is this—calling and justification. These are joined in one, stud if thou hast either of these, thou mayest know thy predestination and thy future glorification.

31. *What shall we then say to these things?*

Oh! have you not often said that? When you have studied the plan of grace, the covenant of God, have you not said to yourself, “What can I say to all this? It is passing wonder; it exceeds the power of comprehension, for the greatness of this glory. What shall we then say to these things?” Well, we will say something practical that shall cheer our hearts.

If God be for us who can be against us?

A great many, but they are all nothing. If God be for us, all they that be against us are not worth mentioning: they are ciphers. If he were on their side, then the one would swell the ciphers to the full, but if he be not there, we may put them all into the scale and reckon them as less than nothing.

32. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

After having given us his own Son, what is there that he can withhold from us if it is for our real good? Nay, he has already virtually given us all things in giving him to us.

Notice, it is not simply “freely give us all things;” but, “with him also freely give us all things.” You shall get all things with Christ; but you shall get nothing without Christ, for all the other gifts come in this one. God first gave us his Son; and he gives us everything in him.

33. *Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.*

Ring out the challenge in heaven itself; trumpet it through all the caverns of hell; let the whole universe hear it: “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?” None can, for “it is God that justifieth,” and his justification blocks every charge that is brought against his people.

34. *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

There is only One who can, for there is only one Judge, and that Judge is Jesus. So, the apostle puts it again in the form of a question—shall he condemn us? He is the Judge. Will he who died condemn? What, die for them, and then condemn them? Will he blow hot and mild, and first intercede for them, and then condemn them? It cannot be. Nobody can condemn them but the Judge; and if he is unable to condemn them, in consequence of what he has already done for them, then none can. But this is not all.

35. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*

Oh, this blessed question—this touching question! It seems to come at the end of all the others—a rear-guard which effectually prevents our treasures from being taken from us. “Quis separabit?” “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

35. *Shall tribulation?*

That has been tried. Have not the saints been beaten like wheat upon the threshing-floor? Has not affliction been to them a stern test of the reality of their faith? But Christ has loved them none the less for all the suffering that he has permitted to fall upon them.

Or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

When they have been in famine or poverty, has Christ ever forsaken his saints?

Ah, no! he has loved them all the more. Have any of these things separated us from our Savior? No; but they have, to our own consciousness, knitted us even more closely to our Divine Lord. Cruel men have tried every form of persecuting the saints of God; they have been more inventive in the torments which they have applied to Christians than in almost anything else; yet no torture, no rack, no imprisonment, has ever divided them from Christ. They have clung to him still, after the manner of John Bunyan, who, when they said, that he might go free if he would promise not to preach the gospel, said, "I will lie in prison till the moss grows on my eyelids rather than I will ever make such a promise as that. If you let me out of prison today, I will preach tomorrow, by the grace of God."

36. *As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*

But has this divided them from Christ? Hear them all, as with united voice they answer.

37. *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

"All these things" have only made the saints cling the more closely to their Lord, instead of separating them from him. Their persecutors thought they were triumphing over them, but it was the martyrs who were the victors all the while.

38. *For I am persuaded,*

Somebody asked, "Pray, what persuasion may you be?" Well, this is my persuasion.

That neither death,

It sends a shiver through some when we begin to speak of death, and the bravest man who ever lived may well tremble at the thought that he must soon meet the king of terrors; but, brothers and sisters, if Christ loves us, and we love Christ,

we may well be persuaded that death will not break the union which exists between us. There is nothing about death that should make Christ cease to love us; our bodies will be under his protection and guardian care, and our souls shall be with Christ, which is “far better” than being anywhere else.

Nor life,

He means that if we were tempted by the love of life to deny Christ, we should be strengthened so that we should not deny him even to save our lives, for his people have been brave enough in this respect in all times. Paul himself counted not his life dear unto him that he might win Christ, and be found in him.

Nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers

Does the apostle mean devils—fallen angels, that would overthrow us, some of them as “principalities” by their dignity, others of them as “powers” by their subtle, crafty force—does he refer to devils?

I think he does, and this, then, is our comfort, that, if we have to meet the arch-fiend himself foot to foot in terrible duel—and we may, for men of God have had so to meet him, and he that does battle with the adversary will gain nothing by it but sweat of blood and aching heart, even if he shall win the victory, so that we may well pray, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,”—still we have this comfort, that even though he may rejoice over us for a moment, and may cast us down, he cannot separate us from the love of Christ; he may open many of our veins, and make us bleed even to utter weakness, but the life-vein he can never touch.

nor things present,

Hard and grinding as they may be.

Nor things to come.

Unknown mysteries dreaded.

39. *Nor height,*

There are some brethren who dwell in the heights; I am rather pleased to meet with dear friends who never have any doubts or fears, but are always full of joy and ecstasy, and who go on to tell us that they have left all these things behind, and have risen to the heights of bliss. This one thing I know, I am sure that there is nothing in those heights that can separate me from the love of Christ; I will stick to that, whatever revelations there may be to the enthusiastic, whatever raptures and ecstasies and extreme delights any may have, they cannot separate me from Christ. I am glad that you have them, brother, may you always keep them; and if I cannot have them, I shall sit down in my struggles and temptations, and still say that there is nothing in the heights—in high doctrine or in high living—that can separate me from the love of Christ.

nor depth,

Jonah went down to the depths of the sea, but he came up with this testimony, that there was nothing there to separate us from the love of God. No; though you should be weary of your life, though you should never have a ray of light by the month together, there is nothing there to separate you from the love of Christ. You may go down, down, down, till you seem to have got beyond the reach of help from mortal man; but there are cords and bands which bind you to Christ that even these depths can never break, come what may.

nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul summons all our foes, and sets them in battle array against us, and when he has added up the total of all their legions, he says that he is persuaded that they shall not be able—shall not be able, mark you—to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let us go forward into the future, however dark it is, with this confidence, that, one thing at least we know—the love of Christ will hold us rest, and by his grace we will hold fast to him. We are married to him, and we shall never be divorced. We are joined to him by a living, loving, lasting union that never shall be broken.

Romans 9

The Jews thought that God must certainly save them. They thought they had a birth claim. Were they not the children of Abraham? Surely they had some right to it. This chapter battles the question of right. No man has any right to the grace of God. The terms are inconsistent. There can be no right to that which is free favor. We are all condemned criminals, and if pardoned, it must be as the result of pure mercy, absolute mercy, for desert there is none in any one of us.

1, 2. *I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost. That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.*

He never thought about his unbelief, brethren, without the deepest imaginable regret. How far is this from the spirit of those who look upon the ungodly without tears—settle it down as a matter that cannot be altered, and take it as a question of hard fate, but are never troubled about it. Not so the Apostle. He had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart.

3. *For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:*

They hated Paul intensely; nothing could surpass the malice of the Jews against the man whom they reckoned to be an apostate from the true faith, because he had become a follower of Christ, the Nazarene. Yet note what is Paul's feeling towards his cruel countrymen; he is willing, as it were, to put his own salvation in pawn if by doing so the Jews might but be saved.

You must not measure these words by any hard grammatical rule, you must understand them as spoken out of the depths of a great loving heart; and when

such a heart as Paul had begins to talk, it speaks not according to the laws of logic, but according to its own immeasurable feelings. There were times when he almost thought that he would himself consent to be accursed, “anathema,” cast away, separated from Christ, if thereby he could save the house of Israel, so great was his love towards them. Of course, this could not be; and no one understood better than Paul did that there is only one Substitute and one Sacrifice for sinners. He only mentioned this wish to show how dearly he loved the Jews, so that on their account he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh.

Do you, dear friends, feel that same concern about your brethren, your kinsmen according to the flesh? If they are not saved, do you greatly wonder that they are not, if you have no such concern about them? But when once your heart is brought to this pitch of agony about their souls, you will soon see them saved.

4, 5. *Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.*

This was what troubled the apostle so much concerning the Jews, that they should have such extraordinary privileges, and yet should be cast away; most of all, that Jesus Christ, the Savior of men, should be of their race, bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, and yet they would not receive him, or be saved by him. Oh, the terrible hardness of the human heart; and what poor things the richest privileges are unless the grace of God goes with them to give us the inner secret of true faith in Christ!

6, 7. *Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect.*

Paul is always jealous lest anyone should suppose that the Word of God has failed, or that the purpose of God has come to naught.

For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children:

Now he goes on to show that the blessings of God's grace do not go according to carnal descent. It is true that God promised to bless the seed of Abraham, yet he meant that word "seed" in a very special sense.

But, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

By passing over Ishmael, God showed that there was nothing of saving grace in blood or birth. Ishmael was the firstborn son of Abraham; but he was passed by, for the promise was, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

Now, the Apostle is getting to his point. You Jews claim to have the mercy of God because you are of the seed of Abraham; but there is nothing in that, says he, for God made a distinct choice of Isaac to the rejection of Ishmael, as he did afterwards of Jacob, and then Esau was left out.

8. *That is, thy flesh which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.*

Now, Isaac was not the child of Abraham's flesh. He was born according to promise, when his mother was past age, and his father well stricken in years. His was the birth according to the promise, and that is the way the line of grace runs —not according to the flesh, but according to the promise. If, then, all my hope of heaven lies upon my being a child of godly parents, it is an Israelitish hope, and good for nothing. If my hope of heaven lies upon my having been born according to the promise of God—born of his grace and of his power—in that line the covenant stands. God is determined that it shall be so.

9–13. *For this is the word of promise. At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated.*

Here were two children born at the same time; yet Esau was not of the true "seed." It matters not how closely you may be connected with the people of God, unless you have a new heart and a right spirit yourself, you still do not belong to the covenant seed, for it is not of the flesh that this privilege comes, but God has chosen a spiritual seed according to his own good pleasure.

14. *What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.*

Paul knew very well that there would always be some who would cry out against this doctrine, that men would say that God was partial and unjust. If he had not foreseen that the declaration of this doctrine would provoke such remarks, he would not have put it so: "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid."

15, 16. *For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.*

You know that the modern way of meeting objections to Scripture is to give up everything to the infidel, and then say that you have won him; but the true Christian way is to give up nothing at all, and if the truth is objectionable, to make it, if possible, still more objectionable, to turn the very hardest side it has right in front of the face of man, and to say, "This is God's truth; refuse it at your peril."

I believe that half the attempts to win over unbelievers by toning down truth have simply been to the dishonoring of the truth and the destruction of the doubter, and that it would be always better to do as the apostle here does—not to disavow the truth, but to proclaim it as fully, and faithfully, and plainly as possible.

17-19. *For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh,*

Paul is now going to show the other side of the same truth.

Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

Paul knew that the doctrine would be objected to on this ground; evidently he intended to assert something which was open to this objection, which would naturally suggest itself to men: “Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

20–25. *Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?*

There was the sting of it. They could not endure that God should in his divine sovereignty save Gentiles as well as Jews. But he has done so, and he has sent the Gospel to us; while they, having refused it, are left in the darkness which they chose.

As he saith also in Hosea, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.

See the grand style in which God talks to men. He speaks after a royal fashion: “I will.” He asks no man’s leave for what he will do: “I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.”

26. *And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto*

them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

That in the very same place where their sins made it patent and palpable they were not God's people—in that very same place shall men confess that they are the children of the living God. Oh! what has not grace done?

See the splendor of this divine sovereignty, which shows itself in wondrous, unexpected acts of grace, selecting and taking to itself those who seem to be self-condemned, and even condemned by himself, of whom he had said, "Ye are not my people."

27–29. *Isaiah also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: for he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as Isaiah said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrha.*

God has a people, then, even in Israel with all its rejection; and he always will have, for he will never make the seed of Abraham to be as Sodom and Gomorrah. He will love his own, and glorify himself in the midst of his people.

30. *What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.*

For thousands of years they worshipped brutish idols and blocks and stones. Their philosophy was mixed with filthiness. Their lives were abhorrent to God. Even these at last have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith, for the Gospel being preached among the Gentiles, they have believed in Jesus, and they are saved.

31. *But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.*

Does it not seem strange that men who were outwardly sinful, who were utterly ignorant of any way of righteousness, and even indifferent to it, have been by the grace of God led to seek righteousness in the right way, namely, by faith in Christ, and they have found it, and God's electing love is seen in them; while others, who seem very sincere and devout as to outward ritual, by following it and it alone, have missed their way, and never found the true righteousness? The sovereignty of God appears in the choosing of those who follow the way of faith, and the casting away of those who follow the way of mere outward righteousness. But why did Israel miss the way?

32. *Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.*

And God is determined that they that are of the law shall not inherit it. He has made it a sovereign decree that the believer shall be justified and saved, and none else. They sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law.

33. *For they stumbled at that stumbling-stone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone and rock of offense:*

I say again that there have been great attempts made, with logical dynamite, to blow up this great rock of offense, and to clear away every difficulty from the path of the man who wants to be saved by his own method, and to make everything pleasant all round for him; but against this course of action we bear our continual protest, for it is not according to the mind of God, or the teaching of his Word: "As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone and rock of offense."

33. *And whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.*

But if they believe not on him, they shall one day be ashamed; and, meanwhile, the eternal purpose of God shall still stand. He shall still be glorious whatever men shall do, or shall not do.

Romans 10

It is very significant that this tenth chapter should immediately follow the subject dealt with in the ninth chapter. In the ninth chapter, we have the doctrine of absolute predestination proclaimed in the sternest and boldest manner—the doctrine that God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and will have compassion on whom he will have compassion. Now, it is commonly thought, by those who do not rightly understand Calvinism, that that doctrine has a tendency to burden the heart and dry up the springs of compassion. That it was not so in Paul's case, is very clear, for this chapter is a most affectionate one, and in it the apostle manifests a most loving spirit towards his fellow-countrymen, the Jews, and the chapter also contains the widest conceivable declaration of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the fact being that the grand doctrine of divine predestination is by no means inconsistent with the fullest and freest preaching of the gospel of Christ.

1. *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.*

No curse falls from his lips, though they had persecuted him without mercy, hunted him from city to city, and gnashed their teeth at the very mention of his name. Yet he has no desire for them but their salvation; he utters no malediction against them, but the prayer goes up from his very heart, "that they might be saved."

Let this be our "heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel." Sorrows upon sorrows have come to the Lord's ancient people even down to this day; and they have been scattered and rent and torn in almost every land. Who does not pity their griefs and woes? Let it be our heart's desire and daily prayer for Israel that they may be saved through faith in the Messiah whom they have so long rejected.

Have all of us this unselfish compassionate feeling? I am afraid that there are some Christians who are very deficient in it; yet, in the dread of an immortality to be spent in woe unutterable by all unbelievers, our hearts' desire and perpetual prayer should be, as Paul's prayer for Israel was, "that they might be saved." And if there is one class among the ungodly which should touch our hearts more than all the rest, it is those who are earnestly seeking salvation, but who are seeking it where they will never find it, namely, by the works of the law.

2. *For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.*

The Jews of Paul's day were zealous, but they were zealous in ignorance. And that is just what we may say, at the present time, concerning a large number of our fellow-countrymen—those who are ordinarily called Ritualists. "They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." None can be more zealous than they are, but a grave error is at the root of their whole system, a fatal ignorance concerning the truth of the gospel.

It is not sufficient for a man to be sincere in his zeal for God; sincerity must be according to knowledge if it is to be of any value. If a man travels to the North, his sincere belief that he is on the right road will not bring him to his destination in the South. If a man, in all sincerity, drinks poison under the belief that it is a cheering cordial, it will kill him, notwithstanding his sincerity; and if a man sincerely believes a lie, it will turn out to be a lie notwithstanding his sincerity. So that it is not enough to be sincerely zealous for God, or sincerely anxious to be saved; but you must seek salvation in God's revealed way if your search is to be a successful one.

3. *For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*

They were so busy trying to work out a righteousness of their own that they had never accepted the righteousness as which God is prepared freely to give to all those who will receive it at his hands.

This is not an error on the part of the Jews alone; it is to be found also among

many Gentiles. Such people must have a righteousness of their own; and Paul says they are continually “going about” to establish it. To do this, they will undertake any labor, endure any suffering, or perform any self-denial; but, all the while, they despise God’s righteousness—despise it by the very act of preferring their own, or seeking another way of salvation instead of walking in the one which God has provided. How sad it is that so many, in all sincerity of blind zeal, should be dishonoring God, and virtually dethroning him by the attempt to set up a righteousness of their own, when he has already provided a perfect one which they will not accept.

A fault—a pitiable and grievous fault—that men should be in earnest and very zealous, and yet nothing should come of it, because they spend that zeal in a wrong direction. Men would make themselves righteous. They would come before God in the apparel of their own works, whereas God has made a righteousness already, which he freely gives, and for us to try and produce another is to enter into rivalry with God—to insult his Son, and do dishonor to his name. May God grant that any here who are very zealous in a wrong direction may receive light and knowledge, and henceforth turn their thoughts in the right way.

4. *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*

“The end of the law” is to make a man righteous, and Christ does make righteous everyone who believes in him. The act of faith in Christ accomplishes what all the good works in the world never can accomplish. He has put the law away so far as his own people are concerned; and, by that act, he has removed the possibility of self-righteousness, since we are no longer under the law. Though there can come no condemnation to us by it, there certainly can come no righteousness by it. Even Christ’s own people can never have any righteousness which cometh by the law; they must look to Christ, and find in him alone all that can be demanded by the law, “for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.”

5. *For Moses—*

The Holy Spirit wisely directed the apostle to quote from Moses, for he was the

lawgiver, and was looked upon by the Jews as the great representative of the law.

Describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth these things shall live by them.

That is the message of the law: “Do, and live.” But the message of the gospel is, “Live, and do;”—a very different thing. The law says, “Work to obtain life.” The gospel says, “You have life freely given to you in Christ Jesus; now work for him because you live by him.”

6–8. *But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, Even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach;*

The apostle says this plan of salvation is so near to men that it is in their mouth. When anything is in your mouth, how can you make it your own? Why, by swallowing it; and so near is the gospel to every man that he has, as it were, but to drink it down, to make it his very own. It is not up there on the lofty heights, nor down there in the deeps of the abyss, but it is wherever Christ is preached, and wherever his Word is read. O, sinner, the Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart, “then, put it not away from thee, but hold it fast for ever!

9. *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

The gospel’s command, “Believe and live,” is quite as clear and plain and positive as the law’s command, “Do and live.” How simple is the divine plan of salvation—confess Jesus Christ, believing in him—or, in the other order, believe in Jesus Christ, and then acknowledge your faith for so it is written, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,”—baptism being the way of confessing

the faith which you already possess.

There is the gospel in a nutshell. What a very simple way it is—to believe these great facts about the Lord Jesus Christ—really to believe them so that they became practical factors in your life. This is all the way of salvation. Christ has not to be fetched down. He has come. He has not to be fetched up. He has risen from the dead. The work is finished. What thou hast to do is to believe in that finished work and accept it as thine own, and thou shalt be saved.

10. *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

After believing in Christ, the man must confess that he does believe in him. It would be a shame for any believer to try to sneak into heaven without owning that Christ has saved him. If any man is ashamed of his religion, you may depend upon it that it is one of which has cause to be ashamed, but he who has true saving faith in his heart should never blush to own it. What is there to blush about in being a Christian? Let those blush who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

11. *For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.*

Though he did much that he need be ashamed of, yet when the law so brought him to believe in Jesus Christ for righteousness, he is righteous, and he is so righteous that he shall never be ashamed of his righteousness, nor ashamed of his faith in Christ. Would God that some who are going about after a righteousness of their own would be led to try this method, and believe in Jesus Christ.

12. *For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek:*

What a blessed word that is—"There is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile"! There are some that want to keep up that difference. They say that we are Israel, or something of the kind. I do not care what we are. There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek.

For the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

Someone said to me, “I think that the Romish Church cannot be the Church of Christ. I do not think that the Church of England is the Church of Christ. Do you think the Baptists are the Church of Christ?” And my answer was, “The Church of Christ is to be found mixed up in all churches, and no churches at all.” It is a people that God has chosen from among men, and they are to be found here and there and everywhere, a spiritual seed that God has marked out to be his own; and they are known by this—that they call upon the Lord, and “the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.”

13. *For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

This was the old prophecy of Joel. The Jews knew it. It is the new teaching of the gospel. The Gentiles know it. Oh! who would not wish to be in that broad “whosoever,” that he might find salvation?

We call upon that name by having confidence in it; by speaking to God in prayer, using that name; by adoring and reverently proclaiming the majesty and the name of God. Whosoever shall call upon or invoke that great name shall be saved.

14. *How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?*

For at the bottom of the saving invocation or call there must be real faith. There cannot be any true worship of God unless it be grounded and bottomed upon faith in God.

And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?

There cannot be such a thing as believing what has never been spoken in our hearing, and has never been made known to us. Of course, reading often answers the same end as hearing. It is a kind of hearing of the Word; but a man must know, or he cannot believe.

And how shall they hear without a preacher?

How is that possible? Do you see the machinery of the gospel? There is the calling upon the name. That comes of faith. There is the faith that comes of hearing; but there is the hearing that comes of preaching. Now a little farther.

15. *And how shall they preach, except they be sent?*

Poor preaching. It will not be the kind of preaching that produces believing hearing, except they be sent. If God does not send the man, he had better have stopped at home. It is only as God sends him that God will bless him.

He is bound to back up his own messenger when he delivers God's own message. "How shall they preach, except they be sent?"

As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.

And they are so beautiful because, you see, God has put them at the root of everything. God makes the preacher whom he sends to be the source of so much good, or the channel of so much good, for by his preaching comes the hearing, and by the hearing comes the believing, and out of the believing come the calling upon the name and the salvation.

See, then, what an honor God has put upon the testimony of his Word; and be not slow, my dear friends, to tell abroad his glorious gospel. The apostle does not merely mean preaching from the pulpit, but preaching anyhow, making known the gospel by any means. It is in that way that hearing comes; from hearing comes faith; and from faith comes salvation. Who, then, would not tell out the glad news which God uses to the salvation of immortal souls?

16. *But they have not all obeyed the gospel.*

That is the pity of it—that so many have heard the gospel, but have not obeyed it. This shows that the gospel comes to us as a command, because we cannot disobey where there is no order or rule. O sinner, listen to this! When you hear

the gospel, it is not left to your own choice to have it or leave it, so that you are as free to do the one as the other; so if you reject it, you are disobedient to it.

For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

As if there were so few that did believe it, that he had to ask who they were. So you see that even the prophet Isaiah had the idea that salvation comes to sinners by believing. He mourned and cried to his God because men did not believe the "report" which he had been sent to deliver to them concerning that Man who was "despised and rejected of men," that Man of whom the prophet truly said, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:…He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."

17. *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

You are wise, therefore, dear friend, if you are seeking salvation to be a hearer of the Word; but mind that it is the Word of God that you hear, because the word of man cannot save you. It may delude you. It may give you a false peace; but the hearing that saves is hearing which comes by the Word of God. Oh! take care, then, that you do not run hither and thither just because of the cleverness of certain speakers; but keep you to the Word of God whoever preaches it, for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."

Salvation comes by faith, and faith comes by hearing, but that hearing must be the hearing of the Word of God. Surely there is no great difficulty in understanding the gospel. This is no maze in which a man may lose himself. Here are no puzzling directions which only the learned can comprehend; oh, no! but here stand the plain, simple, soul-quickening words, "Believe and live."

18. *But I say, Have they not heard?*

These very people for whom the Apostle prayed—have they not heard?

Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

The preaching of the gospel went forth amongst those Israelites, who rejected it. Wherever they went, the gospel seemed to follow them like their shadows. They could not escape from it, but they did not believe it.

19. *But I say, Did not Israel know?*

Did not the Jewish people have a time of hearing and instruction? Certainly they knew, and they knew also that the gospel was not to be confined to them. They had a warning that it should even be taken from them and sent to other nations.

First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.

Moses told them that it would be so if they rejected Christ. Christ would be preached to the Gentiles, and those whom they thought to be foolish would come in and accept what they had rejected.

20. *But Isaiah is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not: I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.*

He told them, therefore, that God would save a people who hitherto had never sought after God—that he would send the gospel to a people that were dead in sin, and had never asked to receive the light and life of God.

21. *But to Israel—*

To God's ancient people, to whom the gospel had been preached when Paul wrote this Epistle: "to Israel"—

21. *He saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.*

God is undoubtedly sincere in every act he did. He sent his prophets, he entreated the people of Israel to lay hold on spiritual things, but they would not,

and though he stretched out his hands all the day long, yet they were “a disobedient and gainsaying people,” and would not have his love; and on their head rests their blood.

Romans 11

1. *I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid.*

God is never weary of his people so as to abhor them, and even when his anger is turned against them, it is but for a small moment, and with a view to their eternal good. Grief in its distraction asks strange questions and surmises impossible terrors. It is a wonder of grace that the Lord has not long ago put us away as men lay aside cast off garments, but he hateth putting away, and will still be patient with his chosen. Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep of thy pasture? They are thine, they are the objects of thy care, they are poor, silly, and defenceless things: pity them, forgive them, and come to their rescue. They are but sheep, do not continue to be wroth with them. It is a terrible thing when the anger of God smokes, but it is an infinite mercy that it does not break into a devouring flame.

For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

The tribe of Benjamin was that from which the first king of Israel was chosen, and he bore the same name as that by which Paul had been known among his Jewish brethren. Paul was, therefore, of the very choicest branch of that vine which the Lord himself brought out of Egypt.

2-4. *God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.*

Even in Israel’s worst days, when her representative man was the weeping prophet Jeremiah, and when her sorrows were greater than even he could express, yet the Lord revealed his love, and promised that blessed days should dawn for the seed of Abraham. These days have not yet come, but they shall

surely arrive, for God hath not cast away his people whom he did foreknow. There is yet a history for Israel; her sun is clouded, but it has not set.

As surely as stands the covenant with day and night, so surely shall the chosen people return from their captivity and possess the land which the Lord has given unto them. In those days the Lord will build them as at the first, and cleanse them from all their iniquities. Then they shall not be proud or arrogant, for his goodness shall startle and astound them and they shall be amazed even unto trembling when they see what great things Jehovah has done for them. The memory of their great national offenses, and especially of their long rejection of the Messiah, shall cause them to wear their high dignity without pride, they shall be subdued by love to a childlike fear of again offending, they shall tremble as they see the Lord God of their fathers glorifying all his grace in them.

Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elijah? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.

God has not forsaken her, he has kept for himself his thousands who have not bowed the knee to Baal, and there has arisen a leader just in the nick of time to seize the banner and to rally the wavering host: for as God lives, and the Spirit still abides in the church, and Jesus is with us alway, even to the world's end, the succession of grace shall never cease.

Let us have no fear about it, but let us exhibit a boundless confidence. God's truth will win the day who ever comes against it. "Is anything too hard for Jehovah?" I have lived to see, and shall yet live to see, such marvels in this respect as fill my mouth with laughter and my tongue with singing; "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." If the Lord waiteth a little it is that he may gain the more glory.

5. *Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace.*

In the worst of ages there has never been a day so black but there was a Hebrew found to hold the lamp of God. There has always been found a Jew who loved Jesus; and though the race now despise the great Redeemer, yet there are not a few of the Hebrew race who still love Jesus the Savior of the uncircumcised, and bow before him. It is these few, this holy seed, that are the substance of the nation, and for their sake, through their prayers, because of God's love to them, he still says of Israel to all nations, "Touch not these mine anointed, do my prophets no harm. These are the descendants of Abraham, my friend. I have sworn and will not repent; I will show kindness unto them for their father's sake, and for the sake of the remnant I have chosen."

6. *And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.*

For if you mix the two together, you spoil them both. Go home, sir, and make yourself a stirabout with fire and water, endeavor to keep in your house a lion and a lamb, and when you have succeeded in doing these, tell me that you have made works and grace agree and I will tell you, you have told me a lie even then, for the two things are so essentially opposite, that it cannot be done. Salvation by grace can only be gripped by the hand of faith: the attempt to lay hold upon it by the doing of certain acts of law would cause the grace to evaporate.

7-10. *What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them: Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.*

The Lord's complaint is "I called and ye refused." Such calls come again and again to many, but they turn a deaf ear to them; they are hearers only, and not doers of the word: and, worse still, some are of the same generation as that which Zechariah spake of when he said, "They pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear."

When men say that they cannot believe the gospel, ask them whether they will patiently hear it in all its simplicity. No, they say, they do not want to hear it. The gospel is so difficult to believe, so they say. Will they come and hear it preached in its fullness? Will they read the gospels for themselves carefully? Oh, no, they cannot take the trouble. Just so. But a man who does not want to be convinced, must not blame anybody if he remains in error. He that will not hear what the gospel has to say need not wonder that objections swarm in his mind.

The gospel asks of men a fair hearing; the Lord says, “Incline your ear and come unto me; hear and your soul shall live,” for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God;” how sad that they will not even hear God’s message of love. It is a wilful objection to the gospel, then, when men refuse even to hear what the gospel has to say, or if they bear it with the outward ear, but will not give hearty attention to its truths.

11, 12. *I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their full salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?*

There will be a day when those who have so long refused to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah shall discern the marks of his mission, and shall mourn that they have pierced him. When the tribes of Israel shall lament their sin with holy earnestness, there shall be no mourning to exceed it, they shall weep even as in the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddo, when the well-beloved Josiah was slain. Discovering that their nation rejected the Son of God, when they crucified Jesus of Nazareth their deeply religious spirit shall be filled with the utmost bitterness of repentance, and each man and each woman shall cry for pardon to the Lord of mercy.

Then, close upon the heels of the weeping shall come the full and complete forgiveness; the transgression of the tribes shall be put away in one day; they shall perceive that the very side which they pierced has yielded a fountain to cleanse them from their sin; joyfully shall they behold on Calvary the brazen serpent lifted up for their healing, the Paschal Lamb slain for their redemption, the sin-offering sacrificed in their stead. What a blessed day will that be when

“all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” O that you and I might live to see that happy era when all the Jewish race shall behold their Messiahs; for then shall the fullness of the Gentiles be gathered in. Our history is wrapped up with theirs.

13. *For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:*

One marvels that Paul was not more narrow in heart, considering his birth and education, but he had vanquished his old notions, and gloried in being the apostle of the Gentiles.

“I magnify mine office,” said Paul; but you never find Paul magnifying himself. He wears the glory as an ambassador of God, not as a private individual. The dignity that God gives to his servants is bestowed upon their office, not upon themselves apart from it. They must never run away with it into daily life, and think that they themselves are “reverend,” because their Lord is so; nor may they claim for their own thoughts the serious attention which they rightly demand for the Word of the Lord.

14, 15. *If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them. For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?*

Whatever their sins may have been, God hath not for ever cast them away. They have become like the dry and thirsty desert, but the day will yet dawn when God’s sovereign love shall again visit them, and his Spirit shall distil upon them until Israel shall be glorious among the nations, and her children shall be multiplied and saved. O that the long-expected day would hasten! Break, hallowed morning, for earth’s watchers are growing weary! The twelve tribes right longingly wait for the appearance of Messiah the Prince, and we also who believe in Jesus, joyfully expect his advent, and the gathering together of Israel. How great will be the day of the Lord’s gracious visitation!

16, 17. *For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert graffed in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree;*

That is a remarkable passage in one of the prophets, where he says, "Ekron as a Jebusite;" meaning that the Philistine when converted should be treated just the same as the original inhabitants of Jerusalem; that the branches of the olive which were grafted in have the same privileges as the original branches. When God takes men from being heirs of wrath, and makes them heirs of grace, they have just as much privilege at the first as though they had been heirs of grace twenty years, because in God's sight they always were heirs of grace, and from all eternity he viewed his most wandering sons.

18-21. *Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be graffed in. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.*

There is a relation between us and Abraham even as Paul assures us in the epistle to the Galatians, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham." Something, surely, is expected of the children of such a man as Abraham. O, for shame, thou unbelieving one! Is Abraham thy father? Art thou one of the faithful seed? Great mountains are often succeeded by low valleys. Perhaps that is the case with you; but it should not be so. The natural seed were cut off because they had no faith, let not those who are grafted in, think to do without it. It is by faith that you are a son at all. You disprove your pedigree if you tolerate unbelief.

22-25. *Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be graffed in: for God is able to graff*

them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert graffed contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

The Jews have never ceased to be a nation, though they have been scattered and delivered over into the hand of their adversaries because of their sins. They may enjoy various rights and privileges in the different countries where they sojourn for a while, but they cannot be absorbed into the nationalities by which they are surrounded. They must ever be a separate and distinct people; and the day shall yet come when the branches of the olive tree, which have been so long cut off, shall be grafted in again. Then shall they, as a nation, again behold the Messiah, the true and only King of the Jews, and their fullness shall be the fullness of the Gentiles also.

26, 27. *And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.*

Though the scattered nation be despised, and the precious sons of Zion comparable to fine gold are esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter, yet the day shall come when “There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” Then Judea’s mountains (thy land, O Immanuel), shall drop down with new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk; then the glorious diadem of her former glory shall return to Zion’s brow, and God, even her own God, shall bless her. The covenant of salt shall be remembered, and it shall be soon that the Lord hath not cast away his people whom he did foreknow.

28. *As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes.*

You know how David sought out the seed of Jonathan, and did them good for Jonathan's sake; even so doth the Lord love believers who are the seed of believing Abraham; and still he seeketh out the children of Abraham his friend to do them good. In the latter days he shall save the literal Israel: the natural branches of the olive, which for a while have been broken off, shall be grafted in again. God has not forgotten his friendship to their father Abraham, and therefore he will return in love to Abraham's seed, and be again their God.

29. *For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.*

He is a God that changeth not. Where he has once set his heart of love upon a man, he never turns away from doing him good. He saith by the mouth of his servant the prophet, that he hateth putting away. Though we sin against him often, and provoke him to jealousy, yet still, as the waters of Noah, so is his covenant to us; for as the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so he swears that he will not be wroth with us nor rebuke us.

"The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."

30-34. *For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: Even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?*

With whom can he take counsel? Who shall instruct him? There existed not another to come into the council-chamber, even if such an assistance could be

supposable with the Most High. In the beginning of his way before his works of old, eternal wisdom brought forth from its own mind the perfect plan of future creations, and every line and mark therein must clearly have been of the Lord alone.

35, 36. *Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things:*

It cannot be doubted that whatever may be the whole drama of history in creation and providence, there is a high and mysterious sense in which it is all of God. The sin is not God's, but the temporary permission of its existence formed part of the foreknown scheme, and to our faith the intervention of moral evil, and the purity of the divine character, do neither of them diminish the force of our belief that the whole scope of history is of God in the fullest sense.

The great plan of salvation was not drawn by human fingers. It is no concoction of priests, no elaboration of divines; grace first moved the heart of God and joined with divine sovereignty to ordain a plan of salvation. This plan was the offspring of a wisdom no less than divine. None but God could have imagined a way of salvation such as that which the gospel presents—a way so just to God, so safe to man. The thought of divine substitution, and the sacrifice of God on man's behalf, could never have suggested itself to the most educated of all God's creatures. God himself suggests it, and the plan is "of him."

To whom be glory for ever. Amen.

This should be the single desire of the Christian. I take it that he should not have twenty wishes, but only one. He may desire to see his family well brought up, but only that "To God may be glory for ever." He may wish for prosperity in his business, but only so far as it may help him to promote this—"To whom be glory for ever." He may desire to attain more gifts and more graces, but it should only be that "To him may be glory for ever." This one thing I know, Christian, you are not acting as you ought to do when you are moved by any other motive than the one motive of your Lord's glory. As a Christian, you are "of God, and through God," I pray you be "to God." Let nothing ever set your heart beating but love to him. Let this ambition fire your soul; be this the foundation of every enterprise

upon which you enter, and this your sustaining motive whenever your zeal would grow chill—only, only make God your object.

Romans 12

1. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,*

Paul is a calm reasoner. He is a bold stater of truth, but here he comes to pleading with us. I think that I see him lift the pen from the paper and look round upon us, as with the accent of entreaty, he says, “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, by God’s great mercy to you, his many mercies, his continued mercies.” What stronger plea could the Apostle have? “I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God.”

That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Though he beseeches you to do it, he claims a right to it. It is but your reasonable service. Do we need to be entreated to be reasonable? I am afraid that we do sometimes. And what are we to do? To present our bodies to God, not our souls alone, to make real, practical work of it. Let this flesh and blood in which your body dwells be presented unto God, not to be killed and to be a dead sacrifice, but to live and still to be a sacrifice, a living sacrifice unto God, holy and acceptable to him. This is reasonable.

2. *And be not conformed to this world:*

Do not live as men of the world do. Do not follow the customs, the fashions, the principles of the world. “Be not conformed to this world.”

But be ye transformed

It is not enough to be nonconformists. Be transformed ones, altogether changed into another form.

By the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

It is by holy living, by consecrated bodies, that we are to prove the will of God. We cannot know it, we cannot practically work it out, except by a complete consecration unto God.

3. *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*

Humility is sober thinking. Pride is drunken thinking. He that thinks more of himself than he should is so far intoxicated with conceit; but he that judges aright and is, therefore, humble, thinks soberly. God give us to be very sober in our thoughts of ourselves.

4, 5. *For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office; So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*

Hence the diversity. If the hand were made exactly like the foot, it would not be a tenth part as useful; and if the eye only had the same faculty as the ear, it would net be able to see, and the whole body would be a loser thereby. Do we begin to compare eyes, and ears, and feet, and hands, and say, “This is the better faculty”? No. They are each one needful. So do not compare yourselves among yourselves, for if you are in the body of Christ, you are each one needful, and the peculiarity which you possess, and the peculiarity which your brother possesses, have their place in the body corporate, and must be precious before God.

6–9. *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of*

faith: Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth on teaching; Or he that exhorted on exhortation:

Keep to your own work; stand in your own niche. If you are only an exhorter, do not pretend to teach. If your work is ministry, and you cannot prophesy, do not attempt to do it. Every man in his own order.

He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation.

Do not pretend to a love that you have not got. Do not lard your speech with "dear" this and "dear" that, when there is no love in your heart; and even if your heart be full of love, show it without spreading molasses ever your talk, as some do. "Let love be without dissimulation."

Abhor that which is evil;

Be a good hater. Abhor that which is evil

Cleave to that which is good.

Stick to it. Hold it fast. Do not go an inch beyond it.

10. *Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love:*

Hear this, ye members of the church. Endeavor to carry it out by a kindly courtesy and a real sympathy one with another.

In honor preferring one another:

Putting another before yourself, aspiring after the second place, rather than the first.

11. *Not slothful in business;*

The ordinary duties of our calling we are not called upon to forget; we are not to neglect the shop for the sanctuary, or the counting-house for the class-meeting. The legs of a fool are not equal, but the holiness of a believer should always be well arranged. Whatever our position in life may be, we are so to order our conduct therein as to commend ourselves for diligence and uprightness both to the church and to the world. The Christian is not to be a worse tradesman because of his religion, but a better; he is not to be a less skilled mechanic, but he is to be all the more careful in his work. It were a pity indeed if Paul's tents were the worst in the store, and Lydia's purple of the poorest dye.

11. *Fervent in spirit;*

At the same time, observe how the next clause calls our equal attention to the higher and more spiritual matter. "Fervent in spirit." We must not neglect the spiritual because of the pressing demands of the temporal. Perhaps we are more likely to forget this precept than the former, therefore let us lay it the more to heart. We are to maintain the holy fire within our souls constantly burning, for that is the meaning of "fervent." Our love to God must not merely be there in a small degree, but it must exist as a vigorous flame. Our spirit must be kept warmly zealous, burningly affectionate. Our spiritual nature is to glow like coals of fire.

Serving the Lord;

Serving the Lord is not mere thought, scheme, plan, resolution; it is the actually spending and being spent, it is the exercise of all the energies of nature, and of all the energies of grace in the cause of him from whom all energy is derived.

12. *Rejoicing in hope;*

When you have not anything else to rejoice in, rejoice in hope.

Patient in tribulation;

The word “tribulation” signifies threshing as with a flail. Be patient when the flail falls heavily.

Continuing instant in prayer;

Joy and patience are curative essences, but they must be dropped into a glass full of supplication, and then they will be wonderfully efficient. How can we “rejoice in hope” if we know nothing about prayer to the God of hope? Whenever your hope seems to fail you and your joy begins to sink—the shortest method is to take to your knees. By remembering the promise in prayer hope will be sustained, and then joy is sure to spring from it, for joy is the first-born child of hope. As for “patience,” how can we be patient if we cannot pray? Have not holy men of old always sustained themselves in their worst times of grief and depression by betaking themselves to prayer?

A hunting dog when in pursuit of its victim works itself into full motion, using every limb and muscle to follow as fast as possible. If you catch a glimpse of it you will see that it throws itself forward with intense eagerness, the whole body and soul of the dog is in motion towards one object; no portion of him lingers, not so much as a glance is given to anything else, the whole creature is instant after the game which it pursues, urgently pressing, hot foot, as we say, to overtake the prey. Now, this is the way in which we are to pray.

13. *Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.*

Prayer is to be exercised in all things, for from its position in the present context we are taught that it is not without prayer that we proceed to “distribute to the necessities of the saints.” Because we have prayed for them we are ready to befriend them by deeds of love. If we have not been accustomed to pray for the brethren, we shall not be “given to hospitality”; much less shall we “bless them which persecute us.” Prayer is the life-blood of duty, the secret sap of holiness, the fountain of obedience.

14. *Bless them which persecute you: bless, and do not curse them.*

Our work is to bless the sons of men. “Bless and curse not.”

15. *Rejoice with them that do rejoice,*

Do net be a wet blanket on their joys. If they have good cause for rejoicing, join in it. Help them to sing their hymn of gratitude.

And weep with them that weep.

Sympathize with mourners. Take a share of their burden. I really believe that it is easier to weep with them that weep than it is to rejoice with them that do rejoice; for this old flesh of ours begins to envy those who rejoice, whereas it does not so much object to sympathize with those that sorrow. Carry out both commands. “Rejoice with them that do rejoice. Weep with them that weep.”

We are members of one body, having one only Head: and one life throbs through all the members of that body. Hence, for us to strive with one another in joy and in sorrow would be to act contrary to the sacred instincts which arise out of Christian unity. If, indeed, we are one with Christ, we are also one with each other, and we must participate in the common joys and common sorrows of all the elect family.

16. *Be of the same mind one toward another.*

Agree together, you Christian people. Do not be always arguing and discussing. Be of the same mind one towards another. In church life very much must depend upon our unity in mind as well as in heart. “One Lord, one faith, one baptism”—these help to make a good foundation for Christian fellowship.

Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Remember that, when the fat cattle begin to push with horn and with shoulder, the Lord knows how to bring their fat down very speedily, so that they can be trusted among the lean cattle without being so domineering over them. The duty of a happy Christian is to take notice of those who are not so joyous as he is, to seek them out, to condescend to men of low estate. When thou hast abundant provision in thy house, it is thy duty to send portions to those for whom nothing

is prepared. Mind that thou attendest to this matter, lest thy Lord should put thee on short commons, too, and make thee feel a little more as thou oughtest to do towards the afflicted.

If God hath hath made our path more pleasant, and hath led us beside the still waters, and into the green pastures—if he hath distinguished us by the common gifts of his providence above many others of his children who are far better and far more holy than we, what shall we say? It is owing only to his grace towards us, and we will not exalt ourselves above our fellows, we will not be high-minded, but condescend to men of low estate; we will not lift our necks with the proud, but we will bow down our brows with the humble; every man shall be called our brother, not merely those who are arrayed in goodly raiment, but those who are clothed in the habiliments of toil, they shall be confessed to be our kindred, sprung from the same stock; for what have we that we have not received, and what maketh us to differ from another?

I wish that some of the stiff-necked gentry of our churches would at times recollect this. Their condition is smooth as oil, and as soft as young down, but their hearts are as high as poplars, and their manners as stiff as hedge-stakes. There have been many who would do well if they would learn that they have nothing beyond what God has given them. And the more God has given them, the more they are in debt.

17. *Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*

Let the children of darkness meet evil with evil, and carry on their wars and fightings, their strifes and their envyings, their malice and their revenge: but as for you, O believers, ye are the children of the God of love, and love must be your life. You have been renewed in the spirit of your minds, and you must not be conformed to this world, but be transformed into the likeness of Christ your Master. Evil for evil should be a principle detested by you, and such should be your loving spirit that it ought to be no longer easy to recompense evil with evil, but hard, yea impossible, to bring you to do anything of the kind. Revenge and fury should be as alien to the spirit of a child of God as they would be to an angel before the throne.

18. *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*

Some zealots seem bent on making religion objectionable. The cup we hold to a sinful world is in itself repugnant enough to fallen nature; there can be no wisdom in making it yet more objectionable by presenting it with a scowling face. It is as well when you have medicine to give to a child to show him a piece of sugar too: so let your kindness, and cheerfulness, and gentleness sweeten that which the world is not very likely to receive anyhow, but which it will the less resent if you present it with love, showing a desire to live peaceably with all men, and to consult the comfort of others rather than your own.

The apostle says, “If it be possible,” because he knew that it would be a very difficult thing always to be peaceable with everybody, for some people are so unreasonable that they are never at peace till they are at war, and never quiet till they are making a disturbance.

19. *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*

Who am I that I should clamber to the throne of God and seize his sword and attempt to make myself judge and executioner among mankind! Will this bear consideration? Can a child of God thus see himself guilty of high treason against his King? How does a man feel when he is on his knees and remember what he has done? How does he say “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us”? Do not his eyes fill with tears and is not his heart heavy with regret?

How will your hard speeches and fierce actions appear when viewed from your dying bed? Will railing, and fighting, and law-suits be sweet memories there? Can such a thing as resenting evil with evil be the subject of our praise to God? Can we ever thank the God of love for enabling us to avenge ourselves? If we cannot pray about it, or praise about it, let us let it alone. Is there anything about it which we could whisper in the ear of Christ? Is there anything in it that will help us to nearer fellowship, with him? Is there anything in anger and wrath which will prepare: us for the business of earth or for the bliss of heaven?

20. *Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.*

Notice that this text inculcates not merely passive non-resistance, though that is going a good way, but it teaches us active benevolence to enemies. “Overcome evil with good,” with direct and overt acts of kindness. That is, if any man has done you a wrong, do not only forgive it, but avenge it by doing him a favor.

If anybody has slandered you, or treated you unkindly in any way, go out of your way to serve him. “If thine enemy hunger, feed him.” You might say “Well, I am sorry for him, but really he is such a vagabond, I could not think of relieving him.” Yet according to this Scripture, he is the very man you are bound to feed. If he thirst, do not say, “I hope somebody will relieve him; I feel no animosity to the man, but I am not going out of my way to give him drink.” According to your Lord’s command, he is the man to whom you must give drink. Go straightway to the well and fill your pitcher, and hasten to give him drink at once, and without stint. You have not merely to forgive and forget, but you are bidden to inflict upon the malicious mind the blessed sin-killing wound of your hearty and practical good-will.

21. *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Good for evil is nobly congruous with the spirit of the gospel. Were we not saved because the Lord rendered to us good for evil? The spirit of the law is “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” but the spirit of the gospel is, “freely I forgive you: your many iniquities and vast transgressions are all blotted out for Christ’s name’s sake, therefore be pitiful towards others.”

Forgiveness is one fruit of the gospel, and doing good in return for evil is another. Should not the spirit of every Christian man be one of unconquerable love? For by unconquerable love he is saved. And, beloved, this spirit of forgiveness is the Spirit of God, and he that hath it becomes like to God.

Romans 13

1-6. *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.*

You may rest assured that a judge who does not punish the guilty is as unjust as the one who does not acquit the innocent. There must be, with every king who is worthy of the name, an execution of the sentence of the law upon evildoers, as well as the award of praise for them that do well.

7, 8. *Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*

Of all things, I do abhor a debt. I shall feel like a guilty sneaking sinner if I come in here with a hundred pounds debt upon it. "Owe no man anything" will stare

me in the face whenever I try to address you. I do not believe that Scripture warrants any man in getting into debt. It may stimulate the people to raise more money; but after all, attention to the simple Word of God is infinitely better than looking at the end which may be obtained by the slightest deviation from it. Let us not owe a farthing to any living soul; that when we come in here we may find that all has been paid.

9. *For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

The legal spirit is all for expansion; it multiplies it commands, and lays down its ritual for this, and that, and the other; but the gospel spirit is all for condensation. It has condensed the whole law into a single word, that is “love.”

10. *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*

Paul has been bidding us to pay attention to relative duties. As citizens, he bids us render honor to magistrates, and to those who are in authority, and to pay all lawful dues and customs, and the like, telling us that we are to owe no man anything except to “love one another;” and then he shows us that the law of love is the abstract and the essence of that great table of the law which concerns a man’s relation to his neighbors.

11. *And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep:*

Here we have a special charge to disciples of Jesus who know the time, and also know that their salvation draweth nigh. They are represented as being asleep and needing to awake from their present sluggishness; but they are not described as those who had ceased to be Christians, or whose salvation was in jeopardy. Though it is admitted that it is high time for them to awake out of sleep, their salvation is never questioned, but on the contrary they are reminded that now it

is nearer than when they believed.

Into what a deep slumber some professing Christians have fallen! How utterly insensible they are to the sins and sorrows of those around them. They believe God has a people, and they are very glad he has, as far as they are capable of being glad of anything that does not concern themselves. But, “the world lieth in the wicked one,” and multitudes are perishing. They are sorry it is so, that is to say, they go the length of saying they are sorry. It does not cause them any sleepless nights, it does not disturb their digestion, it in no way interferes with their comfort, for they do not seem to think that it has anything to do with them.

For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Your salvation, that is, your ultimate, complete salvation, the display and manifestation of your complete deliverance from evil, from sin, from death, from hell, is nearer by so many years than when you believed. Some of us are five-and-twenty years nearer heaven than we were. Ought we not to be more awake? The farther we are off from heaven, the less we may feel its influence; but we are getting so much nearer that we ought to be increasingly sensitive to its mysterious spell. Oh, to feel more of its power!

Christ is preparing heaven for us, and his Spirit is preparing us for heaven. Well, then, if we are getting more ready for heaven, we ought to be more awake, for sleepiness is not the state of heavenly spirits. Heaven is the home of activity, not the dormitory of unconsciousness. When our bodies shall have been raised from the dead, they shall enjoy life and energy, and be for ever free from fatigue and sluggishness. Let us, as we are getting ready for celestial company, be fuller of life and fuller of energy.

12. *The night is far spent, the day is at hand:*

It is the early morning, it is the dawning of the eternal day. The sun has scattered the thick darkness of nature’s night; we are enjoying his first golden beams: the time of the singing of birds has come, the time of the dew of grace, and of the fresh breath of the Spirit. It is not full day yet; but, still, the night has gone, and the perfect day of our salvation, when body and soul too shall be delivered from every taint and trace of the work of Satan, is “nearer than when we believed.”

The light and heat of day are strengthening; the darkness and chill of night are vanishing; we are getting further off from the power of ignorance, sin, and despair; we are getting more and more under the influence of knowledge, holiness, and hope. The apostle would have us know of a surety that the true light now shineth, even that which will grow brighter and brighter unto the perfect day.

Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness,

The man who is just awakened, and finds that it is morning light, must first of all put off the garments which covered him during the night. He quits his bed, and in so doing shakes off his bed clothes and leaves them.

The rags of sin must come off if we put on the robe of Christ. There must be a taking away of the love of sin, there must be a renouncing of the practices and habits of sin, or else a man cannot be a, Christian. It will be an idle attempt to try and wear religion as a sort of celestial overall over the top of old sins.

And let us put on the armour of light.

Now we must put on our morning dress. The believer should at once look to his toilet and array himself for the day: “Let us put on the armor of light.” “What,” says one, “armor? Why, I thought my danger was over. The darkness has departed, and I am no longer afraid of thieves and robbers, for the daylight has come? Why, then, should I put on armor?” Is it not instructive that no sooner do we awake than we have to put on “the whole armor of God”? Does it not warn us that a day of battle is coming? You may as well expect a conflict, for it is sure to come, and it will be wise to put on your harness for the fight. Dress according to what you will meet with during the day. You are not at home yet; the land of peace is yet beyond you.

13. *Let us walk honestly, as in the day;*

The thief breaks through and steals beneath the cover of the darkness; but a child of light must be upright and just. Walk honestly; let all your actions be such as will bear the light. A man that stands under a powerful electric light bearing right

down on him, would feel uncomfortable with everybody looking at him; at any rate, he would be careful what he did. Behold, the light of eternity is shining full upon your soul, God himself sees you, you stand in the blaze of the eternal day. O Christian man, act with transparent honesty; have nothing to conceal: come to the light, that your deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God. Be clothed with light, and walk in the light as God is in the light.

Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

Our position in the light of the morning demands of us one more point of behavior: we must renounce the deeds of darkness. If we have been truly awakened, and have put on the garments of light, it behoves us to have done with the things that belong to the night.

14. *But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,*

In Christ Jesus there is merit to cover our demerit, purity to cover our impurity, obedience to cover our disobedience, beauty to cover our deformity, perfection to cover our imperfection, acceptance to cover our provocation. We are comely with the comeliness which the Lord Jesus puts upon us. He is seen, and we are hidden, or only seen in him so as to be accepted in the Beloved.

There he is, he is a robe that delights to be worn. Myriads of souls have tried this garment, and it has been exactly suitable to every one out of all who have put it on. This is all you have to do, to put it on, and that the Holy Spirit will help you to do. You have not to make the garment, to decorate the garment, or in any way to add to it or to alter it, but only to put it on.

And make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Provide no food for it. Carve it no rations. Starve it out; at any rate, if it wants fodder, let it look elsewhere. When you are allotting your provision to the body, the soul, the spirit, allot nothing to the depraved passions. If the flesh says, “What is for me?” say, “Nothing.”

Romans 14

1. *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.*

I do not think it is worth while to go through a horse pond, and get covered with filth, just for the pleasure of being afterwards washed. It may be that some strong man, like another Samson, may have to go in among the Philistines, and pull their temple down about their ears; but poor Hannah could not do that, and those who are like her—the women of a sorrowful spirit—had better go home, and get out of the way of that set of wranglers. They may even be wrangling professors, squabbling about this doctrine and that, and perhaps not understanding any of them properly

2-4. *For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.*

When one brother envies another, and picks holes in his coat, and finds fault with his service, he needs to hear that inspired question, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth." I pray all the bands of workers to maintain a holy unanimity, being of one accord, minding the same thing, provoking one another to nothing but love and good works, striving for nothing except that they together may promote the glory of the Lord Jesus.

Some are always looking out for other people's duty, and are great judges and

critics for what others ought to do. “Who art thou that judgest another man?” To his own master he stands or falls. See what precepts are binding upon thyself, and then, as a child of God, be thy feet swift to run in the way of his commandments.

5, 6. *One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.*

Just then the bulk of the converts were Jews, and as such, they brought into the Christian Church their former religious habits; those men who had devoutly kept the ceremonial law felt as if they would violate their consciences if they did not continue to keep its more prominent precepts; and though they gave up certain of its observances which were evidently abolished by the gospel, they kept up others, such as special days for religious fasts and feasts. Many true but weak believers were very scrupulous about what they should eat, thinking to keep up the legal distinction between meats clean and unclean.

At the same time the church had in her midst men who said, and said correctly, “The coming of Christ has done away with the old dispensation; these holy days are all types and shadows whose substance is in Christ. Has not the Lord shown to Peter, who is the minister of the circumcision, that henceforth nothing is common or unclean?” The men of strong faith blamed their weaker brethren for being superstitious, and by their superstition bringing a yoke of bondage upon themselves.

“No,” replied the weaker sort, “we were not superstitious; we are conscientious, while you go much too far in your liberty, and cause us to stumble.” Thus while the strong looked down upon the weak, almost doubting whether they could have come into the liberty of Christ at all, the weak condemned the strong, almost charging them with turning their liberty into licence. They were both wrong, for they were judging one another.

7. *For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.*

We either help or hinder those amongst whom we dwell. Let us see to it that we serve our age, and become stepping-stones rather than stumbling-blocks to those by whom we are surrounded.

8. *For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.*

Thus, "the will of God" shall be done both in our service and in our sleep.

9, 10. *For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother?*

If we must needs judge, certainly it should not be those who are linked to us by the ties of spiritual relationship. Are not all believers one family in Christ? Wherever the root of the matter is to be found there exists an overwhelming argument for undying unity. Why, then, wilt thou take thy brother by the throat and drag him before thy judgment seat, and make him answer to thee, brother to brother, and then condemn him? Shall a brother condemn a brother?

When the outside world censures Christians we understand it, for they hated our Master, and they will hate us; but inside the charmed circle of Christian communion there should be esteem for one another, a defending of each other: we should be anxious rather to apologise for infirmity than to discover imperfection.

Far be it from us to find flaws where they do not exist. Would to God it were so, that perfect love cast out all suspicion of one another, and that we had confidence in each other, because Christ our Lord will hold up our brethren, even as he has upheld ourselves.

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

Judgment will come soon enough: may the Lord have mercy upon us in that day. My brother, why needest thou hurry it on by thyself ascending the throne? Cannot God do his own work? "Vengeance is mine: I will repay," saith the Lord.

We need not spend our time in perpetually trying to discern between the tares and the wheat.

11. *For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.*

Both sheep and goats shall gather before the great dividing shepherd: the wise and foolish virgins shall both hear the midnight cry; the house on the rock and the house on the sand shall alike be tested by the last tremendous storm; tares and wheat alike shall ripen; bad fish and good shall be sorted out from the net, while the multitudes outside, the nations that knew not God, shall all without exception hear with trembling the summons to the dread tribunal.

12. *So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

The apostle argues strongly against this evil spirit of censoriousness in the Christian Church; and to give a knock-down blow to it he says, “It is all needless; you need not judge one another, for both your brother and yourself will stand before the judgment seat of God. There is no need of your condemnation, for if any man be worthless the Judge will condemn him: you may not interfere with the business of the great Supreme; he will manage the affairs of men far better than you can.”

Yet more, your judgment is unprofitable: you would spend your time much more profitably if you would recollect that you also who can be so exact and severe in pointing out this fault here, and the other fault there, will be yourselves examined by an unerring eye. Your own account books have to be sent in, and to be examined item by item; therefore look well to your own matters.

How many times I have had to appear before the judgment seat of my fellow-men! Sometimes one’s motives are impugned; another time one’s actions, or mode of speech, or way of managing church affairs. Well, it is a small matter for us to appear before men’s judgment seat: we may very well refuse to put in an appearance at all, for man is not our master, and we are not bound to answer to his summons.

13. *Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this*

rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

Why is it that so many brethren seem to think that they are masters, and have a right to judge the Lord's servants? I know some Christians who not only form judgments, and very severe judgments, upon all that are round about them as to the facts that come under their notice; but they, also, without any facts whatever, conceive notions concerning persons whom they have never seen, and are full of obstinate prejudices against them. Many twist words into meanings which they were never intended to mean by the person who used them; and others, even without so much as the excuse of misunderstanding words, sit down and imagine evil against their brethren.

14. *I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.*

The Mosaic law attached great importance to meats and drinks: the Christian religion attaches none. The apostle Peter was shown by the vision of a sheet let down from heaven, not only that all nations were now to receive the gospel message, but that all kinds of food were now clean, and that all the prohibitions which had formerly been laid upon them for legal purposes were now once for all withdrawn.

Prohibition upon mere ceremonial points, and commands upon carnal matters are now abolished, and great is our liberty: we shall be foolish indeed if we suffer ourselves to be again entangled with the yoke of bondage. Our minority was ended when the Lord, who had aforetime spoken to us by his prophets, at last sent his Son to lead us up to the highest form of spiritual manhood.

I wot our apostle was tender of weak consciences; but he could expostulate with the brethren somewhat thus, "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye dogmatize—touch not this, taste not that, handle not the other—and all about things which perish with the using?"

15. *But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not*

charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

A Christian may, if he pleases, put himself under restrictions as to these matters. In the example of Paul we have full liberty; he would put no embargo upon the conscience. But in his example we have also fervent charity; he would put no stumbling-block in his brother's way.

16-18. *Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.*

Some have tried what could be done by advising abstinence from meats and drinks. This is a very proper thing in its place, and may lead to useful results; but Christ's teaching is, "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh our of the mouth, that defileth a man." It is the heart which must be affected; and nothing that comes of man, or that can be manipulated by the human hand, seems able to touch that. "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God," is the demand even under the old law; and one of the first laws of pure spiritual religion is this, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;" and hence, no, impression can be of any saving use to a man unless it reaches his heart.

19-21. *Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.*

Whatever be the enmity without, we must love one another. If we do not walk in love we certainly cannot have prosperity. God alone can give peace to a church, and he only gives it by sanctifying its members, stirring them up to good works,

keeping them in sacred activity, making them fit to labor for him, and working in them to do that which is well-pleasing in his sight.

When you hear of disturbances in churches you need not so much seek to compose the differences among the members as to amend the men themselves. We should not gather so many thorns if the plants were figtrees; wars and fightings would never spring up among us if we were not carnal and unsanctified. If we were more spiritually minded we should be more ready to forgive and less likely to offend or to be offended.

“Are ye not carnal?” saith the apostle, “because one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Cephas,” and the like; but once let the God of peace sanctify each believer, and then will every man seek his brother’s good, and the things which make for peace. When you pray for the peace of Jerusalem remember that you can promote it by laboring after holiness.

22, 23. *Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*

That is, whatsoever you cannot do with the confidence that you are doing right, is sin to you? Though the deed may be right to other people, if you have any doubt about it yourself it is evil to you. That is to say, even though the thing you do is right, if you do not believe it to be right it is not right to you. There are many things that I may do that you must not do, because you do not think it would be right to do them. Therefore you must refrain.

Even, I say again, if the thing be not in itself a wrong thing, yet if it seem wrong to you, it will be wrong to you: therefore do it not. Paul could eat the meat that had been offered to idols without being troubled in his conscience; but there were some who thought that if they ate it they would be partakers with the idol. Paul did not think so, and, moreover, he said, “An idol is nothing in the world. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles I eat asking no question for conscience sake.” Still “he that doubteth is condemned if he eat”; if he has his doubts about it, and thinks it should not to, it must not be. He will not to practicing the art of well doing if he does that concerning which his conscience raises any scruple.

If thou canst say with Scripture warrant “God permits this and I can do it, feeling that he does permit it,” thou art doing well in so doing, not else.

Romans 15

1. *We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*

When we are free from scruples upon any point, and feel that there are things that we may do because we are strong, yet let us not do them if thereby we should grieve others who are weak. Let us think of their infirmities; and whatever liberty we may feel entitled to claim for ourselves, let us look at the matter from the standpoint of other people as well as from our own, that we may bear the infirmities of the weak, and not seek to please ourselves.

2, 3. *Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell or, me.*

He took the most trying place in the whole field of battle; he stood where the fray was hottest. He did not seek to be among his disciples as a king is in the midst of his troops, guarded and protected in the time of strife; but he exposed himself to the fiercest part of all the conflict. What Jesus did, that should we who are his followers do, no one of us considering himself, and his own interests, but all of us considering our brethren and the cause of Christ in general.

4. *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*

This is as if somebody had said, “Why, Paul, it was David who said what you just quoted.” “Yes,” he replies, “I know that I quoted David, but he spoke in his own person concerning his Lord, ‘for whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.’”

That we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

Before we have any inward ground of hope, God himself, as revealed in the Bible, must be our hope. We must not ask for joy first and then found our faith upon it, but our joy must grow out of our faith, and that must rest upon God alone. Our apostle sets us an example of how to use the Scriptures, for in this chapter he searches out the truth from Moses, and David, and Isaiah, and then places one text with another and gets a clear view of the testimony of God.

What is very much to our point, he sees in those Scriptures that to us Gentiles God has of old been set forth in the Scriptures as the God of hope. Aforetime it seemed as if salvation were of the Jews and of the Jews alone, and we were shut out; but now, on turning to the Old Testament itself, we discover that God had spoken good things concerning us before we knew him. There was always hope for the Gentiles, and though Israel perceived it not, yet patriarchs and kings and prophets full often spake words which could not otherwise be interpreted.

"In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" is a promise which overleaped the bounds of Canaan. As, then, by searching the apostle found in the word of God hope for the Gentiles, so will the most heavy laden and burdened spirit discover sources of consolation if the Bible be diligently read and faithfully believed. Every promise is meant to inspire the believer with hope; therefore use it to that end. Use the written word as the source of comfort, and do not look for dreams, excitements, impressions, or feelings. Faith deals with the Scriptures and with the God of hope as therein revealed, and out of these it draws its fullness of joy and peace.

Beloved, if you desire to get faith in Christ, or to increase it, be diligent in knowing and understanding the gospel of your salvation as set forth in the word of God. "Faith cometh by hearing," or by reading the word of God. How shall you believe that which you do not know? Do not at once make an effort to believe before you are instructed, but first know what God hath revealed, see how he hath displayed to you the hope of everlasting life, and then believe with all your heart the testimony of God.

5. *Now the God of patience and consolation—*

"Comfort" is really the word he used, turning into prayer the thought which had been suggested by his use of the words "patience and comfort."

Grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

"Make you to be unanimous, not concerning that which is evil, but that you may be of one mind in your likeness to Christ Jesus." What a blessed harmony it would be if, not only all in any one church, but all in the whole of the churches were likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus! It will be so when he gathers those who are now scattered; but may we never hope to have it so here on earth? I cannot tell; but, at any rate, let us all strive after it. We shall be likeminded with one another when we become likeminded with Christ; but not till then.

6. *That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Let us all endeavor to pitch our tune according to Christ's keynote; and the nearer we get to that, the less discord there will be in the psalmody of the church.

7. *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.*

Christ did not receive us because we were perfect, because he could see no fault in us, or because he hoped to gain somewhat at our hands. Ah, no! but, in loving condescension covering our faults, and seeking our good, he welcomed us to his heart; so, in the same way, and with the same purpose, let us receive one another.

8. *Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:*

It was to Abraham and his descendants that the promise was made that, in him, and in his seed, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. So our Lord came, as a Jew, to be "a minister of the circumcision." Let us never forget that he came

to those whom we are apt to forget; and, peradventure, even to despise, “to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.’”

9, 10. *And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written: For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name. And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.*

If there be any joy for the elect nation, it is for us also who believe. If there be any joy for Israel redeemed out of Egypt, led through the Red Sea, fed with manna, and brought to the borders of Canaan, that joy is for us also if any joy over the burnt offering, if any joy at the paschal supper, if any delight at the jubilee, all that joy may be shared by us, for thus saith the Lord, “Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.” Joy in their joy.

11. *And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.*

Now, where there is praise there is joy, for joy is a component element of it. They that praise the Lord aright rejoice before him. Go, ye Gentiles, when David bids you thus unite with Israel in praising God, he bids you take full possession of the joy which moves the favored nation to magnify the Lord.

12. *And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.*

There were plain indications, in the Old Testament, that the blessing was meant for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews; but, still, it was made known to the Jews first, and we must never forget that.

13. *Now the God of hope*

Our God is called the God of hope, not only because he is the object of our hope, and the ground of our joy and peace, but because he it is that worketh hope and joy in us. No joy is worth the having unless the Lord is the beginning and the

end of it, and no joy is worth receiving except it springs from hope in him. He must breathe peace upon us, or else the storm-tossed waters of our spirit will never rest, nor is it desirable that they should, for peace without God is stupefaction, joy without God is madness, and hope without God is presumption. In true believers their hope, faith, joy, and peace are all alike of divine workmanship. Our spiritual raiment is never homespun; we are divinely arrayed from head to foot.

Fill you with all joy and peace in believing,

Peace is joy resting, and joy is peace dancing. Joy cries hosanna before the Well-beloved, but peace leans her head on his bosom. In the midst of bereavements and sickness we may scarcely be able to rejoice, but we may be at peace. When faith cannot break through a troop with her sacred joy she stands still and sees the salvation of God in hallowed peace. We work with joy and rest with peace. What a blessing it is that when we come to die if we cannot depart with the banners of triumphant joy all flying in the breeze, we can yet fall asleep safely in the arms of peace.

How pleasant a life do they lead who are not the subjects of any very great excitement, but maintain calm and quiet communion with God. Their heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. They neither soar nor sink, but keep the even tenor of their way. It is a state of mind, then, which admits of variations; and I really do not know which to choose out of its two forms.

The joy and peace here spoken of are through believing. You come to know the God of hope through the Scriptures, which reveal him; by this you are led to believe in him, and it is through that believing that you become filled with joy and peace. It is not by working, nor by feeling, that we become full of joy; our peace does not arise from the marks, and evidences, and experiences which testify to us that we are the sons of God, but simply from believing. Our central joy and peace must always come to us, not as an inference from the internal work of the Spirit in our souls, but from the finished work of the Lord Jesus, and the promises of God contained in the Scriptures.

That ye may abound in hope,

This is the story as far as I am concerned:—I began with believing. I felt nothing good within me, but I believed in what God revealed concerning himself. I saw nothing, but I believed, on the ground that God said so. I soon had joy and peace in my soul as the result of my faith, and now, because of this joy and peace, I hope and expect further blessings. Though still resting my soul upon the finished work of Jesus, yet hopes do arise from the work of the Holy Ghost within me.

The God who has given me by believing to rejoice that the past is all atoned for, and who has given me peace because my sins are forgiven me for his name's sake, will not dash that joy by revoking my pardon. He who has given me joy, because he has quickened me, and has, up to this day, preserved me, will not, I am persuaded, forsake me, and suffer me to perish. Surely he will never leave me, after having done so much for me. My present joy gives me a hope, most sure and steadfast, that he will never turn his back upon me. If he did not intend to bless me in the future, he would not have done so much for me in the past, and he could not and would not be doing so much for me now.

Through the power of the Holy Ghost.

Our apostle rightly adds, "by the power of the Holy Ghost," for I take it that this is partly mentioned by way of caution, because there are hopes arising out of inward experience which may turn out to be fallacious, and therefore we must discriminate between the hope of nature and the hope of grace.

14-16. *And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God. That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.*

Now would have been the time for Paul to say that he had been made a minister "to offer the unbloody sacrifice of the mass," if such a thing had been right;—to offer up the daily sacrifice, as the so-called "priests" aver that, they now do; but

he says nothing of the sort; and even when he represents the Gentiles as being offered up, he does not speak of any sacrifice going therewith, but says that it "might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."

17-24. *I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God. For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand. For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you. But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you; whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company. But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints.*

It was a great delight to him to have to go to Jerusalem—it was a place which was much reverenced and loved by him; it was a greater privilege for him to go and exchange salutations with his brother apostles; and it was the most joyous privilege of all to be the bearer of a contribution from the Gentiles to relieve the necessities of the saints at Jerusalem. He rejoiced much more in that gift to Jewish believers than if it had been anything for himself.

26, 27. *For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.*

For these Achaians and Macedonians had received the gospel from the saints in Jerusalem. The Gentiles had been made partakers of their spiritual things, so it was their duty to minister to the poor Christian Jews in carnal things.

28. *When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain.*

That is, “when I have delivered the money, and obtained a receipt in full for it; when I have discharged my duty in this matter.”

29. *And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.*

He was sure of that, but he did not know how he would go in other respects. He did not know that he would go to Rome as a prisoner; he could not foresee that he would be sent there as an ambassador in bonds; and little, I wean, did he care in what manner he would go, so long as he had the absolute certainty that he should go “in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.”

30. *Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;*

He knew his own weakness, he knew the difficulty of the work to which he had been called, he knew that if he failed in his enterprise it would be a sad failure, injurious through coming ages to the entire church. He cried, “Agonize for me,” because he felt that much depended upon him. It is like a man who is willing to lead the forlorn hope; but he says to his comrades, “You will support me.” It is like one who is willing to go into a far country, bearing his life in his hands; but he plaintively exclaims, “You won’t forget me, will you? Though you stay at home, you will think of me!” It reminds us of Carey, who says, when he goes to India, “I will go down into the pit, but brother Fuller and the rest of you must hold the rope.”

Can we refuse the request? Would it not be treachery? It is not according to the heart of true yoke-fellows, it is not according to the instincts of our common

humanity, that we should desert any man whom we set in the front of the battle. If we choose a man to be our representative in the service of our God, we will not desert him. A man cannot be charged with egotism if he begs for personal support when he is engaged in labors for others, and is not seeking himself but the success of the great cause.

31. *That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea;*

Certain zealots bound themselves with an oath that they would not eat till they had slain him; but they went a long while hungry; for the arm of the Roman Empire was stretched forth to protect Paul against his infuriated countrymen. Strange it was that Caesar's power must be as a shield around the feeble servant of the mighty God! From raging mobs and secret confederacies Paul was saved, apparently, by Roman soldiers, but secretly by Roman saints.

And that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints;

For there were some saints in Jerusalem who were very narrow-minded, and who hardly thought it right to accept anything from Gentiles. They had not got clear of their Jewish bonds, and Paul was a little afraid lest what he was taking to them might not be acceptable, so he asked the Romans to pray about that matter. Is there anything about which believers may not pray? If there he, then we have no right to have anything to do with it. Bring everything before God in prayer, for all right thing way lawfully be prayed about. So Paul asked the Christians in Rome to pray about that matter of his journey to Jerusalem, and also to pray for his return—

32. *That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed.*

He may or may not have been on his way to Spain, as he purposed: he certainly was on his way to prison, as he had not purposed. His first prayer, that he might be delivered from them that believe not in Judaea, was not answered in the way of his never being in danger from them, or coming into difficulties through them; but he was delivered out of their hands by becoming a prisoner to the Roman

governor, and being sent under his guardianship to Caesar, to whom he had appealed. By that means he traveled to Rome at the expense of the Imperial Government, and on landing at Puteoli, close to Naples, he found friends waiting for him, and as soon as the Roman brethren heard of his landing, they despatched a company to meet him at Appii-Forum, a place on the road to Rome, where they stopped to change horses, and to take refreshments. There he saw his prayer beginning to be answered. Further on, at a place called the Three Taverns, more dear friends from Rome met him, "whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." The Roman saints had long looked for the apostle, and he came at last—an ambassador in bonds, a prisoner who must go to the Praetorian guard-room, and there await the emperor's will and pleasure.

33. *Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

What does Paul wish for them? "The God of peace be with you," not only "peace be with you," but, better far—"The God of peace," and so the source and fountain of peace. He wishes them, not the drops, but the fountain itself, not the light only, but the sun. He would have God himself to be with us as "the God of peace." He would have the Lord to fill us with an inward peace, so that we may never be disturbed in our minds. He would have the Lord shed abroad his own peace in our hearts, so that we may always feel at peace with God: no cloud coming between our souls and our heavenly Father: no ground of quarrel arising between us and the great King.

Romans 16

This chapter contains Paul’s loving salutation to the various Christians dwelling at Rome. Remember that it is an inspired passage: although it consists of Christian courtesies addressed to different individuals, yet it was written by an apostle, and written not as an ordinary letter but as a part of the inspired volume. Therefore there must be valuable matter in it; and though, when we read it, it may appear to be uninstructive, there must be edifying matter beneath the surface, because all Scripture is given by inspiration, and is meant to benefit us in one way or another.

It shows to us one thing, at any rate, that Paul was of a most affectionate disposition, and that God did not select as the apostle of the Gentiles a man of a coarse, unfeeling, selfish turn of mind. His memory, as well as his heart, must have been in good condition to remember so large a number of names, and these were but a few of his many beloved brethren and spiritual children all over the world whom he mentions by name in his other epistles.

1, 2. *I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints,*

It is a distinction and honor among Christians to be allowed to serve, and the most menial employment for the church of God is the most honorable. Every man who seeks honor after God’s fashion seeks it by being abased, by undertaking that ministry which will involve the most self-denial, and will secure the greatest reproach. Foremost in the ranks of the divine peerage are the martyrs, because they were the most despised; they suffered most, and they have the most of honor.

So Phebe shall have her name inscribed in this golden book of Christ’s nobility,

because she is the servant of the church, and because, in being such, she succoured the poor and needy. I doubt not she was a nurse among the poorer Christians, or as some call them, a deaconess, for, in the olden time, it was so, that the elder women who had need were maintained by the church, and in return occupied themselves with the nursing of sick believers; and it were well if such were the case again, and if the old office could be revived.

And that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

I do not think that the apostle alluded to any church business, but to her own business, whatever that may have been; she may have had monies to gather in, or some complaint to make at head-quarters of an exacting tax-gatherer. I do not know what it was; and it is quite as well that Paul did not tell us. It is no part of an apostle's commission to tell us other people's business; but whatever business it was, if any Christian in Rome could help her he was to do so. And so if we can help our Christian brethren in any way or shape, as much as lieth in us we are to endeavor to do it. Our love must not lie in words alone or it will be unsubstantial as the air.

3, 4. *Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.*

Here you have a household, in which both the father and the mother, or say the husband and the wife, were joined to the church of God. What a happy circumstance was this! Their influence upon the rest of the household must have been very powerful, for when two loving hearts pull together they accomplish wonders.

What different associations cluster around the names of "Priscilla and Aquila" from those which are awakened by the words "Ananias and Sapphira"! There we have a husband and a wife conspiring in hypocrisy, and here a wife and a husband united in sincere devotion. Thrice happy are those two are not only joined in marriage, but are one in the Lord Jesus Christ; such marriages are made in heaven.

This couple appear to have been advanced Christians, for they became instructors of others; and not merely teachers of the ignorant, but teachers of those who already knew much of the gospel, for they instructed young Apollos, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures. They taught him the way of God more perfectly, and therefore we may be sure were deep-taught Christians themselves; we must usually look for our spiritual fathers and nursing mothers to those households where husband and wife are walking in the fear of God; they are mutually helpful, and therefore grow in grace beyond others.

5. *Likewise greet the church that is in their house.*

It is a great privilege when a Christian family can accommodate the church of God, it is well when they judge that the parlour will be honored by being used for a prayer meeting, and consider that the best room in the house is none too good for the servants of God to meet in. Such a dwelling becomes like the house of Obededom, where the ark of God tarried and left a permanent blessing behind.

Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

You know what that means. When Paul began to preach in Achaia, Epenetus was one of his first converts, and while every minister feels a peculiar attachment to all his converts, he has the tenderest memory of the first ones. What parent does not prize above all others his first child?

6. *Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.*

This is the sixth Mary mentioned in the Bible. She appears to have been one who laid herself out to help the minister. “She bestowed much labor on us,” says the apostle, or “on me”—she was one of those useful women who took personal care of the preacher, because she believed the life of God’s servant to be precious, and that he should be cared for in his many labors and perils. What she did for Paul and his fellow laborers we are not told, but it was something which cost her effort, amounting to “much labor.” She loved much and therefore toiled much. She was “always abounding in the work of the Lord.”

7. *Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.*

Now, if I understand this passage right, we have here a case of two men, perhaps they are both male names, Andronicus and Junius, or else a husband and wife or a brother and sister—Andronicus and Junia; but at any rate they represent part of a household, and part of a very remarkable household too, for they were kinsmen of Paul, and they were converted to God before Paul was, which interesting fact slips out quite incidentally. I have wondered in my own mind whether the conversion of his relatives helped to irritate Paul into his murderous fury against the church of Christ, whether when he saw Andronicus and Junia his relatives, converted to what he thought to be the superstition of Nazareth—whether that excited in him the desperate animosity which he displayed towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

8, 9. *Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord. Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.*

Christian love in Paul's days—though it loved all the saints—had its specialties. Read down the chapter, and you will find Paul saying, "my well-beloved Epenetus," "Amplias my beloved in the Lord," "Stachys my beloved," and "Urbane our beloved in Christ." All these were persons whom he especially esteemed. There were some whom he liked better than others, and you must not blame yourself if you judge some Christians to be better than others, and if you therefore love them better; for even the Lord himself had a disciple whom he loved more than the rest. I desire to love all the Lord's people, but there are some of them whom I can love best while I know the least about them, and feel the most comfort in them when I have not seen them for a month or so.

10. *Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household.*

Not "Salute Aristobulus," no, but they that are of his household. Why leave Aristobulus out? It is just possible that he was dead, but far more likely that he was unsaved. He was left out of the apostle's salutation because he had left

himself out; he was no believer, and therefore there could he no Christian salutation sent to him. Alas for him, the kingdom of God was near to him, yea, in his house, and yet he was unblessed by it!

11. *Salute Herodion my kinsman. Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.*

Now I fancy that Narcissus was the master of the house, and that the converts in the house were his servants or his slaves. There was a Narcissus in the days of Nero, who was put to death by Nero's successor. He was Nero's favourite, and when I have said that, you may conclude that he was a man of no very commendable character. It is said of him that he was extremely rich, and that he was as bad as he was rich.

Yet while the halls of the house of Narcissus echoed to blasphemous songs, and while luxurious gluttony, mingled with unbridled licentiousness, made his mansion a very hell, there was a saving salt in the servants' hall and the slaves' dormitory. Perhaps under the stairs, in the little place where the slave crept in to sleep, prayer was made unto the living God, and when the master little dreamed of it, the servants about his house sang hymns in praise of one Jesus Christ, the anointed Savior, whom they adored as the Son of God.

12, 13. *Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord.*

I suppose two sisters, the names sound very like it. Where were their brothers? Where was their father? Where was their mother? "Tryphena and Tryphosa," how often have I seen them in the church, two humble, earnest, faithful women, the lone ones of the family, and all the rest far off from God! O brother, let not your sister go to heaven alone. Father, if your daughters be children of God, do not yourself remain his enemy. Let the examples of your godly children help you, O parents, to be yourselves decided for the Redeemer! Hail to you, ye gracious women who keep each other company on the road to heaven! The Lord make you a comfort to one another. May ye shine both here and hereafter like twin stars, shedding a gentle radiance of holiness on all around. There is work for you in your heavenly Father's house, and though you may not be called to public preaching, yet, in spheres appropriate, you may with much acceptance "labor in the Lord."

Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.

I do not suppose Tryphena and Tryphosa were angry because the apostle made this distinction, but it is certainly a very plain and explicit one; the first two "labored," but Persis "labored much." So there are distinctions and degrees in honor among believers, and these are graduated by the scale of service done. It is an honor to labor for Christ, it is a still greater honor to labor much. If, then, any, in joining the Christian church, desire place or position, honor or respect, the way to it is this—labor, and labor much. Persis had probably been a slave, and was of a strange race from the far-off land of Persia, but she was so excellent in disposition that she is called "the beloved Persis," and for her indefatigable industry she receives signal mention.

13. *Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.*

Now, this is a case of a mother and her son. I would not wish to say anything that is far-fetched, but I think there is no vain conjecture in supposing that this good woman was the wife of Simon the Cyrenian, who carried the cross of Christ. You will remember he is said by Mark to be the father of Alexander and Rufus, two persons who evidently were well known in the church of God at that time. And here we have familiar mention of Rufus and his mother.

Whether she was the wife of Simeon or not she seems to have been a kind, good, lovable soul, one of those dear matrons who are at once an ornament and a comfort to the Christian church; and such an excellent woman was she that Paul when he calls her the mother of Rufus adds, "and mine"—she had been like a mother to him.

I do not wonder that such choice mothers have choice sons—"chosen in the Lord." If those whom we deeply love carry their religion about with them set in a frame of affectionate cheerfulness, it is hard to resist the charms of their lovely piety. When a godly woman is a tender mother, it is no wonder if her sons, Rufus and Alexander, become believers in Jesus Christ too, for their mother's love and example draw them towards Jesus.

14, 15. *Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.*

When the apostle Paul wrote, “Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas,” why, many of us say, “Whoever were these good people?” And when he goes on to mention, “Patrobas, Hermes,” we ask, “And who were they? What did these men attempt or perform? Is that all? Philologus, who was he? and who was Olympas? We know next to nothing about those good people.” They were like the most of us, commonplace individuals; but they loved the Lord, and therefore as Paul recollected their names he sent them a message of love which has become embalmed in the Holy Scriptures.

Do not let us think of the distinguished Christians exclusively so as to forget the rank and file of the Lord’s army. Do not let the eye rest exclusively upon the front rank, but let us love all whom Christ loves; let us value all Christ’s servants. It is better to be God’s dog than to be the devil’s darling. It were better to be the meanest Christian than to be the greatest sinner. If Christ is in them, and they are in Christ, and you are a Christian, let your heart go out towards them.

16. *Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister,*

It is pleasant to see the stronger and weaker sex thus associated. “They grew in beauty side by side” in the field of nature, and now they bloom together in the garden of grace. It is a sweet relationship, that of a godly brother and sister, they are as the rose and the lily in the same posy; but had they no other relatives? Were there no others remaining of their kindred? Had they no trouble in spirit concerning others dear to them? Depend upon it, they often prayed together, and sighed because their relatives were not in Christ, for concerning all the rest of the family the record is blank. God hear your prayers, my dear friends, when you, like Nereus and his sister, unite in brotherly prayer and sisterly intercession.

And Olympas, and all the saints which are with them. Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.

The whole passage shows the love of the apostle towards the saints and brethren at Rome. He would not have taken the trouble to write all this to them if he had not really loved them. And it shows that there were Christians in those days who were full of love to each other. Their salutation, the holy kiss, marked their fervor of love, for they were by no means a people given to use outward signs

unless they had something to express thereby. O that Christian love reigned among all Christians now to a greater extent!

17, 18. *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

Leave him his utmost liberty to go where he likes, believe what he likes, and do what he likes; but, at the same time, you as Christian people must disown him, that is all you ought to do, except to pray and labor for his restoration.

19, 20. *For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.*

"The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly," because our Vindicator, who is to bruise the serpent's head, still liveth. The old serpent may nibble at your heel for a while, as he did at your Master's, but you, in the strength of your Lord, shall bruise his head; and whatsoever other adversary of your soul there may be, at any time, rest you in quiet confidence. Even if that adversary is permitted to prevail over you for a while, say unto him, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

He repeats the expression verbatim in his epistles to the Corinthians, and to the Philippians, and also in his second letter to the Thessalonians. He closes each of these epistles with precisely the same benediction, therefore he felt it to be fitting and weighty.

21-24. *Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and*

Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you. I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord. Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Grace in Christ, grace through Christ, and grace with Christ—put these together, and even then you have not grasped the whole. He desires for us all the grace that is in anyway connected with Christ; for you will have remarked that in the close of the second of Corinthians, where he gives the same benediction, he extends it, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all." Here he gives it the shorter form, but he doubtless intended it to comprehend all the rest. He really wishes that the one comprehensive blessing of the divine unity, even all the triple blessing of the sacred Trinity, may abide with all those who by faith were one with Christ, and therefore were beloved of the apostolic soul. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" then includes all the grace secured to us in the eternal covenant.

25. *Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began,*

The sublime plan of the Gospel of the grace of God is so entirely beyond the compass of our natural faculties that we could never, by searching, have found it out. For many an age the light did not shine upon heathen lands. One spot, alone, upon all the earth received the genial beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Vast continents, thickly populated, full of life, bustle and enterprise, lay spread out as a moral waste, barren and neglected. But little revelation of God had found its way among the teeming multitudes of the population. To them the dispensation of the grace of God had not been proclaimed. The mystery of Christ was not as yet made known unto the sons of men. The Israelites had a monopoly of Covenant privileges.

26. *But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God,*

But now in these latter days, how wondrously are the tables turned! The branches of the wild olive have been grafted in “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel.” Thus the Lord has taken unto Himself a numerous seed once ignored by Israel, “which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” Not after the lineage of the flesh, but according to the nobler lineage of faith, the same are the children of Abraham—and with faithful Abraham do they inherit the Covenant mercy of God. This day the barren woman keeps house and is the joyful mother of many children. The Gentile Church has her stones of sapphire—God is in the midst of her to make her glad!

Made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:

I pray you, be not disobedient to the gospel, for faith is a duty, or we should not read of “the obedience of faith.” Jesus Christ, when he is about to bless, challenges men’s obedience by issuing his royal orders.

27. *To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.*

1 CORINTHIANS

1 Corinthians 1

In this chapter the apostle magnifies the cross of his Lord, as God’s greatest gift to the world; and as the highest glory of God’s self-revelation to men.

He praises God that the Corinthian Christians have experienced the saving grace that comes by faith in the sinner’s sacrifice on Calvary. He rejoices, too, that that same grace has taught them to look forward to the Savior’s return in glory. But he is compelled to reprove them for some divisions and rivalries that sprang from their glorying in gifts rather than graces. This leads him to remind them how God had disparaged mere worldly wisdom by saving mankind by the death of Jesus. And he brings all to a very practical application in the verses that we now ponder.

1. *Paul, called to be as, apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God,*

Paul could never have sustained the great weight of responsibility and tribulation which fell upon him if he had not felt that he was “called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God.” No man will ever be fit for the ministry of the Word unless he is called to it by God. This also will be your strength in every other station of life; if God has called you to your peculiar work and warfare, he will not send you at your own charges, but he will be at the back of you, and support you even to the end. I think it; is for this reason that Paul so constantly dwells upon his own calling when he is about to write to the churches, that he may remind other believers that they have similar privileges in their spheres of labor.

and Sosthenes our brother,

This brother had been put to great shame. He was beaten before the judgment-

seat, if you remember, and now he has the great and lasting honor of being mentioned by the apostle with himself. God will honor those who bear dishonor for his name's sake. Be not ashamed even to be beaten for Christ; the stripes are stripes of glory.

Note the humility of Paul in associating with himself an almost unknown brother, Sosthenes. Although the letter is written by Paul alone, yet, as if he did not care to stand in isolation even for a moment, he associates Sosthenes with himself in the salutation.

2. *Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus,*

Called to sacred uses, set apart unto God. That is the call of all believers; they are like those vessels of the sanctuary which were not to be used by any but the priests of God, and by them only for God's service.

called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,

The epistles were written to distinct churches, but they have a bearing upon all Christians; hence the apostle says, "With all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord." Let us thank God no Scripture is of private interpretation; every promise belongs to all the seed. If you are a believer, you may freely appropriate to yourselves whatever was said of old to any individual believer, or to any congregation of believers.

both theirs and ours.

That is a very happy phrase, "both theirs and ours". There are multitudes of saints whose faces we never saw yet Christ is theirs, there are some with whom we might not agree in all particulars, yet Christ is theirs just as much as he is ours. All Christ is theirs, and all Christ is ours, and here is the grand bond of union between believers of different nationalities and different tongues.

3. *Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and from the*

Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace first, for that is the fountain; then peace comes, for that is the fitting stream to flow from the fountain of grace. Seek not peace first, for there is no peace for unregenerate man; grace first, then peace, and both must come from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

4. *I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;*

That is wisely written, for Paul was about to upbraid these Corinthians for many serious faults, yet he begins by acknowledging that they had certain excellences. It gives you a ground to stand upon if you are willing to see all that is good in those whom you have to rebuke. But Paul did not merely use this as a polite way of commencing his Epistle, but he did really every day thank God for the grace which these Corinthians had; yet how seldom do we thank God for the grace that he has given to other people, especially if they outshine us, if they do more for the cause of God than we do; then, we half regret that they have so much grace, but it was not so with Paul.

It is something to be thankful for God's goodness to yourself, but it is a higher virtue to be thankful for God's goodness to others. How grateful we might be all day long if we had a quick eye to see the grace of God in our fellow-Christians, and if we blessed God for it whenever we saw it! There are some whose eye is much more quick to see imperfections than to see graces; it is a pity to have such a jaundiced eye as that; may we have a good, sound, clear, gracious eye, which will see all the good there is in our fellow-believers; and may we then ascribe it all to God, and bless and praise him for it!

5, 6. *That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:*

The church of Corinth was a church of all the talents: it was not, however, a church so much of all the graces, and so it was a very poor example for us. I sometimes think that its mode of worship is recorded rather as a warning beacon

than as an example to us. It caused, incidentally through the abundance of their gifts and everybody wanting to exercise his gift, great divisions, and there was an absence of humility and love in the church. However, Paul is thankful for what they have.

7. *So that ye come behind in no gift: waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is a fine trait in their character, they did look to the second Advent; it operated upon them, it helped them in many ways. We cannot now mention all the holy uses which he in the warning for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but it ought to be a good description of all Christian men.

8. *Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that we may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul continues to recognize the abundance of their endowments, and to express for them the utmost of affection, and then he adds his full conviction that God would prove the power of his grace by keeping them unto the end, and then presenting them “blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It was very wise of Paul thus to praise these Corinthians where they could be praised, for he was about to upbraid them and reprove them for many things which were not pleasing to God. If you have the unpleasant duty of rebuking those who deserve it, always take care that you begin by saying all that you can, and all that you ought, in their favor; it will prepare the way for what you have to say to them afterwards. The Corinthians were a highly-gifted church; they probably had more knowledge and more of the gifts of utterance than any other church of their day; but, alas! they fell into greater sin than did their sister churches. Great gifts are not great graces; but great gifts require great graces to go with them, or else they become a temptation and a snare. Yet Paul felt quite sure that God would keep even these Corinthians with all their imperfections, and confirm them unto the end; and that which was true of them, is also true of all the Lord’s people, God will preserve them to the very end.

9. *God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his*

Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” To be called by the faithful God is the guarantee of everlasting salvation.

10. *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same kind and in the same judgement.*

They could not speak the same thing if they had not the same mind and the same judgment. Paul dreaded the introduction of anything that would divide the hearts of believers one from another; and, beloved, let every one of us, wherever we go, be on the side of Christian truth, Christian unity, and Christian love. There is no true unity outside of truth; and the nearest way to Christian union is union in the truth. When error shall be destroyed, that which divides will be taken away; when truth is dominant, union will be universal, but it will not be so before that is the case.

11. *For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by they which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you.*

He does not go beating about the bush, but he speaks straight out, and gives the name of his informants, for persons who bring reports about others should always be ready to have their names mentioned. It may be unpleasant for them, but it is sometimes necessary to do unpleasant things and those who will not allow their names to be mentioned in connection with a statement adverse to character deserve no notice whatever.

12. *Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.*

So that, at the least, there were four parties in this one little church which ought

to have been knit together in unbroken harmony; this is only one instance of what has happened hundreds of times since. These Corinthians had a great many speaking brethren among them, and they held services in which it was open to anybody to speak as he felt inclined. There was no reason why they should not do so; but what was the result of it? This Christian liberty of theirs, by-and-by, tended to mischief. They became divided into factions, they did not practice discipline as they ought to have done, and therefore this community at Corinth is a beacon to all other churches, warning them not to carry on their worship in a similar style. It is a very curious thing that some people have taken these Corinthians as an example instead of a warning; and, having copied their methods, the very same result has followed, till there is no section of the Church of Christ that has become such a scandal, through its divisions and its intestine quarrels, as that which has imitated the Corinthians in their mode of worship. I suppose that, while human nature is what it is, the same causes will produce the same results to the very end of the chapter. Paul does not tell them that their mode of worship was wrong: perhaps it was not, for great liberty is allowable to Christians; but he does lay the axe at the root of their divisions.

13-15. *Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name.*

They were each a quarrelsome set of people that he could not have taken any comfort from having baptized them; he was glad that they could not quote his name as having done so; and thus, it may be, have added still more to their division and strife.

It may have been an accidental circumstance that he did not happen to have baptized then, but he is glad of it, for he says that in the temper they were in, some of them would have made a boast of it.

16, 17. *And I baptized also the household of Stephanus: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel:*

There were other people who could baptize for him: it was enough for that he should concentrate all his energies upon that one matter of preaching the gospel, not that he neglected the divine command, but that it was not necessary that he, any more than his Master, should baptize personally, for we read that "Jesus Christ baptized not, but his disciples." Not to put a dishonor upon the ordinance, but to let us see that the ordinance does not depend upon the man, but upon that sacred name into which we are baptized, and upon the true faith of the person baptized.

not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

A very remarkable passage! Paul could have used the wisdom of words. In some of his epistles he gives us a specimen of his mighty rhetoric. He was a born master of speech. There was a touch of poetry in him, and always a high logical power, but he would not use it in his preaching, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. You may do what you like with human wisdom, put a bit into its mouth and try to lead it into obedience to Christ, but somehow or other its tendency is to rebel against him.

18. *For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.*

I suppose that, in that church, with its many eloquent speakers and men of knowledge, there came to be a spirit of emulation among them as to which should speak best; sad some brethren were tempted to End novel meanings in the Word, and to come to the meetings to tell of their wonderful discoveries. The apostle says that he did not so preach; he kept to the cross of Christ, which some counted to be but foolishness. "We know all about that," said they. "Ah, but!" replied the apostle, "unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

19, 20. *For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?*

Indeed he has; he has let it run the full length of its tether so that we may see the folly that can be taught by wise men.

21. *For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

God, in his infinite wisdom, raised up a number of philosophers just about the time of the coming of Christ, and a little before that great event. If ever there were great minds upon the earth, it was then; yet these men, with all their schools of thought, knew not God, and the people did not follow after them, so that the earthly wisdom turned out to be a failure.

22. *For the Jews require a sign,*

They were always looking for supernatural manifestations.

and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

They would believe nothing but what could be proved to them by logic.

23–25. *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

They call it foolishness, but it is wiser than men's wisdom. God at his lowest (if we can imagine such a thing,) is wiser than man at his highest "and the weakness of God (if such a thing could be,) is stronger than men."

And yet you will perceive that the church is always looking after wise men after the flesh. If it can find these, it straightway cringes before them, and asks these learned doctors to teach it something more than the simplicities of Christ. This is the old disease of the church. May God cure her yet.

26. *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.*

There are a few such. Remember how the Countess of Huntingdon used to say that she was very thankful for that letter "m," for it does not say "not any noble," but "not many noble are called."

27, 28. *But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not,*

Those that do not even seem to have an existence, those that are so despicable that men do not deign to take any account of them, these are the very things with which God shall break in pieces the many mighty errors of all the ages.

29. *That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

This is what flesh always likes to do. Proud flesh we speak of, and all flesh is such. Flesh has a great tendency to swell, to corrupt; it is easily puffed up; but God will not have it so. What is flesh to God? Did not he make all things? Shall the thing formed boast itself against the Former?

And, at this day, it is a great snare to the Church when she glories in her education, when she puts any confidence in the learning, or the wit, or the eloquence of her ministers, when she relies in any degree whatever upon an arm of flesh. The sword of the Spirit, if it be put into a velvet and embroidered scabbard, is all the worse for that; pull it out. The Word of God cannot cut while it is hampered with human wisdom and human learning half as well as when its keen edge alone is used. It is the Lord, by the power of his Spirit, who must make the Word effectual. Oh, for more faith and truer faith in him!

30. *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*

In fact, we have everything in Christ; we have in his prophetic office wisdom, in his priestly office righteousness and sanctification, and in his royal office, in which he paid the price of our salvation, we have redemption.

31. *That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

There is no one else in whom we may glory; far hence be every form of boasting except that of making our boast in the Lord, and especially of glorying in the great atoning sacrifice of his dear Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 2

1. *And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.*

The fashion of the world is to admire him most who shall speak most rhetorically. Accursed be the day in which oratory was tolerated in the Christian pulpit. It has been the bane and plague of the church of God. This labor after flowery speech, this seeking after polished periods and gaudy sentences, what is it but a pandering to the world, and a prostitution of the ministry of reconciliation. Had men learned what the apostle meant when he said, “I brethren, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom,” they would have preached far other wise than they have done. We should strive to speak the gospel simply from our hearts, and then men’s hearts will be impressed with the truth.

2. *For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

Paul was a very determined man, and whatever he undertook he carried out with all his heart. Once let him say “I determined” and you might be sure of a vigorous course of action.

Paul gloried in the crucified Redeemer; the dead and buried Christ, the sin-bearing Christ, the Christ made a curse for us, as it is written, “Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” This was the subject to which he confined himself at Corinth: beyond this he would not stir an inch. Nay, he does not merely determine to keep his preaching to that point, but he resolves not even to know any other subject; he would keep his mind fast closed among them to any thought but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

3-5. *And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.*

If he had power among them, he determined that it should be the power of the Holy Ghost and no other power. The charms of oratory are but a poor and fickle force; tricks of language are a wretched sort of witchcraft. Instead of the coloured flames of fancy, Paul would let into their minds the pure white light of truth as it shines from the cross.

6. *Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:*

The apostles and their followers preached with such power, that the world soon felt their presence. On the slabs of stone which mark the burial places of the early Christians in the catacombs of Rome, the inscriptions are nearly all ill spelt, many of them have here a letter in Greek and there a letter in Latin, grammar is forgotten, and orthography is violated, a proof that the early Christians who thus commemorated the martyred dead were many of them uneducated persons: but for all that they crushed the wisdom of the sages and smote the gods of classic lands.

7, 8. *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

It was just the darkness of their minds that led them thus to hunt the only Savior of sinners to his death. Satan himself would scarcely have had a hand in crucifying Christ had he understood that, by that very crucifixion, Christ would break the old serpent's head for ever.

9. *But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

This passage is most commonly applied to heaven, but any one who reads the connection will discover that the apostle is not talking about heaven at all. He is only speaking of this—that the wisdom of this world is not able to discover the things of God—that the merely carnal mind is not able to know the deep spiritual things of our most holy religion.

This text is a great general fact, capable of specific application to certain cases; and that the great fact is this—that the things of God cannot be perceived by eye, and ear, and heart, but must be revealed by the Spirit of God; as they are unto all true believers.

Every prophet who has stood upon the borders of a new dispensation might have uttered these words with peculiar force. He might have said, as he looked forward to the future, God having touched his eye with the anointing eye-slave of the Holy Spirit, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him; but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.”

11. *For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*

It is by divine revelation that we must know the thoughts of God, and the more we know of them, the more shall we realize that they are very deep.

12. *Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*

All the blessings of salvation are a gift. All the inheritance of the covenant is a gift. All that which comes by our Lord Jesus to save and sanctify men is a gift.

The power with which we receive these gifts, which God freely gives, is the power of the Holy Ghost; and this, also, we do not purchase or deserve, but we freely receive it. The power to grasp Christ does not lie in our nature in its own strength or goodness. Our state is that of death, and death cannot grasp life. God the Holy Spirit must breathe life into us before we can rise from the grave of our natural depravity, and lay hold upon Christ, who is our life.

The way to know the things of God is for that which is written in the Word of God to be also written upon the heart by the same Spirit who wrote in the book. I heard about repentance, but I never knew repentance until I repented; I heard of faith, but I never knew faith until I believed; I heard of pardon, but I never knew pardon until I was washed in the blood of the Lamb; I read about justification by faith, but I was never justified till, by faith, I received the Lord Jesus to be my righteousness. Appropriation by faith gives an apprehension by the understanding: experimental enjoyment creates true acquaintance.

If still you desire to know more of the infinite preciousness of the gifts of God, it is a wise ambition; and it will be fully and freely satisfied by the Holy Spirit. Resort to him, for he is the great Teacher; there is no instructor like him. His knowledge surpasses all other, for he knows the mind of God. No man can communicate to you what he does not know, and no man knows the mind of God but the Spirit of God. The Holy Ghost knows the infinite and the unsearchable; and therefore he is able to teach you what you cannot learn elsewhere. The mind and meaning of God in every gift of grace the Spirit can unfold to you. There is no being taught effectually except you are taught of the Spirit of God. All other teaching is superficial, and therefore temporary and vain; but the Holy Spirit speaks to the soul, and writes the lines of truth on the fleshy tablets of the heart, so that they can never be erased. If you would know the things freely given us of God, the Holy Spirit must lead you into the inner secret of the sacred treasure-house.

13. *Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*

I am afraid there is but little Bible searching nowadays. If the Word of God had been diligently studied there would not have been so general a departure from its teachings. Bible-reading people seldom go off to modern theology. Those who

feed upon the Word of God enjoy it too much to give it up. Comparing spiritual things with spiritual, they learn to prize all revealed truth, and they hold fast the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

14. *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

Under the term “natural,” the apostle includes all those persons who are not partakers of the Spirit of God; it matters not how excellent, how estimable, how intelligent, how instructed they may be. On the other hand, all into whom the Spirit of God has come, breathing into them a new and diviner life, he puts down under the other head of spiritual men.

And then he goes on to affirm concerning natural men—those who are not partakers of the Spirit—that the truths of God, which are spiritual, they do not and cannot receive. He teaches that it is utterly impossible that they ever should receive then, unless lifted out of that class of natural men and transformed by the Spirit’s work into spiritual men. This change, however, being effected, they will not only receive the things of the Spirit, but embrace them with delight, feed upon them with intense satisfaction, and rise eventually into that state of glory which is next beyond the state of grace.

15. *But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.*

The saints, being led of the Spirit, discern between the precious and the vile; they know the voice of their Shepherd, but a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers. The saints judge this world, and by their living testimony condemn its sin. “Know ye not that we shall judge angels” in the day of the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ? Instead of being judged and following others, they who love God become the leaders in right, and are as God’s mouth rebuking iniquity.

16. *For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

O divine Spirit, lead us into these truths while we meditate, and afterwards help us to show in our lives the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 3

1. *And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*

The church at Corinth consisted of persons of large education and great abilities. It was one of those churches that had given up the one-man system, where everybody talked as he liked—a very knowing church, and a church of Christians, too; but for all that. Christian babies. And though they thought themselves to be so great, yet the apostle says that he never spoke to them as to spiritual: he kept to the simple elements regarding the carnal part as being too much in them as yet, to be able to drink down spiritual things.

2. *I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto: ye were not able to hear it, neither yet now are ye able.*

How grateful we ought to be that there is milk, and that this milk does feed the soul—that the simplest truths of Christianity contain in them all that the soul wants, just as milk is a diet upon which the body could be sustained, without anything else. Yet how we ought to desire to grow that we may not always be upon milk diet but that we may be able to digest the strong meat—the high doctrine of the deep things of God. These are for men, not for babes. Let the babes be thankful for the milk, but let us aspire to be strong men that we may feed on meat.

3. *For ye are yet carnal: for where as there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal and walk as men?*

A united church, you may conclude, is a growing church—perhaps a grown church; but a disunited church, split up into factions where every man is seeking

position and trying to be noted such a church is a church of babes. They are carnal, and walk as men.

4. *For while one saith, I am of Paul: and another, I am of Apollo; are ye not carnal?*

Instead of that, they should all have striven together for the defense of the common faith of Jesus Christ No greater symptom of mere infancy in true religion than the setting up of the names of leaders or the preference for this or that peculiar form of doctrine, instead of endeavoring to grasp the whole of truth wherever one can find it.

5, 6. *Who then is Paul, and who is Apollo, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered: but God gave the increase.*

Let God, then, have all the glory. Be grateful for the planter, and grateful for the waterer, ay, and grateful to them as well; but, still, let the stress of your gratitude be given to him without whom watering and planting would be in vain.

7-9. *So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one:*

They are pursuing the same design; and Apollos and Paul were one in heart. They were true servants of one master.

And every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

The church is built up. God is he who builds it up—the master of the work, but he employs his ministers under him to be builders.

10. *According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon.*

Paul began the churches; he was the first preacher of the gospel in Corinth, and also in other places; and other preachers followed in his footsteps.

When a man lays a good foundation, he always feels anxious that those who come after him should build in the name substantial manner as he has begun. It is a great grief to a man if he sees that, after he her laid a foundation of truth, somebody else follows, and builds up an error on the top of it. Alas, men do that still sometimes.

11-13. *But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: For the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*

Very easy to build up a church quickly. Very easy to make a great excitement in religion, and become very famous as a soul-winner. Very easy. But time tries everything. If there were no other fire than the mere fire of time, it would suffice to test a man's work. And when a church crumbles away almost as soon as it is got together when a church declines from the doctrines which it professed to hold, when the teaching of the eminent teacher is proved, after all, to have been fallacious and to have been erroneous in practical results, then what he has built comes to nothing! Oh! dear friends, what little we do we ought to aspire to do for eternity. If you shall never lay the brush to the canvas but once, make an indelible stroke with it. If only one work of sort, shall come from the statuary's workshop, let it be something that will live all down the ages.

But we are in such a mighty hurry: we make a lot of things that die with us ephemeral—results. We are not careful enough as to what we build with.

May God grant that this truth may sink into our minds. Let us remember that, if it is hard building with gold and silver, and harder still building with precious

stones, yet what is built will stand the fire. It is easy building with wood, and easier still with hay and stubble, but then there will be only a handful of ashes left of a whole lifework, if we build with these.

14–15. *If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.*

If he be a good man, he builds for God; though he may build mistakenly, and say much that he ought not to have said. He shall escape, as a man flies out of a burning house, but all his work is gone. What a dreadful thing that would be, at the end of life, to get into heaven, but to have seen that all your life's work had been a failure; to have been building a great deal, but to see it all burned; or to know, as you die, that because it was not God's truth, it would all be burned!

16. *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*

Do you know it? He says, "Know ye not?" but I might leave out the "not" and say, "Know ye that ye are the temple of God?" What a wonderful fact it is! Within the body of the saint, God dwells, as in a temple. How do some men injure their bodies or utterly despise them, though they would not so do if they understood that they are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in them.

17. *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*

If any man should pull down that which Paul built for God, if any man shall pull down that which any faithful minister of Christ has built before him, "him shall God destroy;"

18. *Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*

Do not let him seek to be reckoned wise by the philosophers of the period, who are always against the truth of God. Let him consent to be thought to be a fool; yea, let him know in his own heart that he is not wise; and then let him yield himself up to the wisdom of God. Consciousness of ignorance is the vestibule of knowledge, and he that knows right well that he is a fool is on the way to becoming a wise man. He that would pass into the temple of wisdom must first of all confess his unwisdom.

19, 20. *For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.*

What a wonderfully small difference there is, after all, between the very cultured man, who thinks himself so, and the man who makes no pretense to it whatever! The knowledge which the wisest man has is about equal, in the presence of God, to the knowledge which one child of three years old has over a child of two years old. To God we must all seem masses of ignorance; and if you could put the whole British Association and all the doctors of divinity, and all the LL.D.'s, and all the men of high degrees together, the things they did not know would make a great many volumes, and the things they did know would not go very far. "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain."

21-23. *Therefore let no man glory in men.*

There really is not anything to glory in, in men. "The best of men are men at the best." Never need we exalt ourselves or extol others. "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him?" "Let no man glory in men."

For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

In Hebrews 1:2, we are told that God has appointed Christ heir of all things. Then we are heirs of all things—heaven and earth, time and eternity, anything that you can conceive of the things that can be named and cannot be named, things conceivable and inconceivable, finite and infinite, human and divine.

Christ's property extends to all, and we are co-heirs. Therefore, our rights and our property extend to all things whatsoever they may be.

Children of God, all men are yours, to serve your highest benefit. All ministers and leaders in Christ are yours to seek your souls' good. Treat them as bees do flowers, and gather honey from them all. "All things are yours."

1 Corinthians 4

1. *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ,*

The apostle was anxious to be rightly accounted of, and well he might be; for ministers are not often estimated rightly: as a rule, they are either gloried in, or else despised.

We are ministers. The word has a very respectable sound. To be a minister is the aspiration of many a youth. Perhaps if the word were otherwise rendered, their ambition might cool. Ministers are servants; they are not guests, but waiters; not landlords, but laborers.

The text, however, does not call us simply ministers or servants, but it adds, “of Christ.” We are not the servants of men, but of the Lord Jesus. Our sole responsibility is to him whom we call Master and Lord. We obey superior orders; but we cannot yield to the dictation of our fellow-servants, however influential they may he. Our service is glorious, because it is the service of Christ: we feel honored in being permitted to wait upon him whose shoe’s latchet we are not worthy to unloose.

and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Brethren, we are stewards of the mysteries of God: we are “put in trust with the gospel.” Paul speaks of the gospel of the blessed God which was committed to his trust. I hope none of you have ever had the misfortune to be made a trustee. It is a thankless office. In executing a trust, there is little scope for originality: we are bound to carry out a trust with literal exactness.

2. *Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*

It is not required that a man be found brilliant, or that he be found pleasing to his associates, or even that he be found successful. All that is required is, that he be found faithful; and truly this is no small matter. It will need that the Lord himself be both our wisdom and our strength, or we shall surely fail.

We are entrusted with a certain amount of talent, and strength, and influence, and we have to use this trust money with a single purpose. Our purpose is to promote the Master's honor and glory. We are to seek God's glory, and nothing else.

3. *But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.*

I would not trust the world to judge God's servants, and it is a mercy to know that the world shall not have the judging of the church, but rather, the saints shall judge the world. Human opinion is not to be put in competition with divine revelation.

4, 5. *For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*

As for us, the saints shall judge the world, but for the present the order is "judge nothing before the time." We can separate between the outwardly vile and the outwardly pure, by marks which God has given us, such as these, "By their fruits ye shall know them," and "If any man love not the Lord Jesus let him be anathema." As guardians of the church's honor we are bound to use these rules; but between brother and brother, differing on minor points, between Christian and Christian, each one obeying his conscience, we are not to exercise mutual condemnation.

6, 7. *And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed*

up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

Our apostle displayed great wisdom in his rebuke of the Corinthians. He did not cry down their talents; he did not say that it was altogether a thing of no value to be able to argue, to be able to preach, to be able to discern spirits, or to be able to speak with tongues.

The apostle follows a far more sensible course; he does not deny the talent, but asks where it comes from; he does not irritate, but cuts deep while he asks one or two questions, which strike at the very root of self-esteem. In effect these questions were as follows "If you are a superior person, and a man fit to be a teacher of others, whence did you obtain this superiority? If you are different from the common people, who makes you to differ? If you are a person of remarkable gifts, how came you to possess them? If all your distinguishing abilities are gifts from God, why do you boast? Why do you exalt yourself? What have you which you have not received? Now, if you received everything as the gift of divine charity, why do you glory as if you had not received it?"

8-13. *Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.*

When the gospel was preached, instead of being accepted and admired, one universal hiss went up to heaven; men could not bear it; its first Preacher they

dragged to the brow of the hill, and would have sent him down headlong: yea, they did more, they nailed him to the cross, and there they let him languish out his dying life in agony such as no man hath borne since. All his chosen ministers have been hated and abhorred by worldlings; instead of being listened to, they have been scoffed at; treated as if they were the offscouring of all things, and the very scum of mankind.

14-16. *I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.*

More precious than the gold of Ophir are men who stand out as pillars of the Lord's house, bulwarks of the truth, champions in the camp of Israel. How few are our apostolic men! We want again Luthers, Calvins, Bunyans, Whitfields, men fit to mark eras, whose names breathe terror in our foemen's ears. We have dire need of such. Where are they? Whence will they come to us? We cannot tell in what farmhouse or village smithy, or school house such men may be, but our Lord has them in store. They are the gifts of Jesus Christ to the church, and will come in due time.

He has power to give us back again a golden age of preachers, a time as fertile of great divines and mighty ministers as was the Puritan age, which many of us account to have been the golden age of theology. He can send again the men of studious heart to search the word and bring forth its treasures, the men of wisdom and experience rightly to divide it, the golden-mouthed speakers who, either as sons of thunder or sons of consolation, shall deliver the message of the Lord with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. When the Redeemer ascended on high he received gifts for men, and those gifts were men fitted to accomplish the edification of the church, such as evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These he is still able to bestow upon his people, and it is their duty to pray for them, and when they come, to receive them with gratitude. Let us believe in the power of Jesus to give us valiant men and men of renown, and we little know how soon he will supply them.

17-21. *For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into*

remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

If the Word shall come in any other power than this, it will come in vain; but if it come in the Holy Ghost, Oh! then, then its end is achieved, for the Holy Ghost quickens men by a mysterious operation, which we cannot describe, but which some of us have felt, which comes upon men and creates in them a new life, and whereas they were dead in sin they begin to live as they lived not before.

That same Spirit then enlightens them, showing a thousand truths in a light in which they never saw them before; they find they have entered into a now world; they have passed from darkness into marvellous light. Then the Spirit of God begins to purify them. He purges them from this sin and that, and he refines, renews them; he is in them as a spirit of burning, consuming sin—a cleansing spirit purging them from unrighteousness. Then he comes as a consoling spirit, and gives them joy and peace, uplifts them above their cares, their temptations, their doubts and fills them with a preface of eternal bless. Oh! blessed is that man to whom our gospel comes with the Holy Ghost.

1 Corinthians 5

1-5. *It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Perhaps the saddest proof that society is far from pure is found in the fact that seducers and fornicators, if they be but gentlemen, may enter respectable society. Brand the miscreants, I say. If the woman be shut out as a harlot, what shall be done unto the lustful maker and cherisher of harlots? If hell burns hotter at one time than another it is for those who make what should have been a temple of the Holy Ghost, into an instrument of rebellion against both man and God.

6-8. *Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

The apostle Paul while he was showing the Corinthians how wrong they were to tolerate an incestuous person in their midst, compared the spirit of uncleanness

to an evil leaven; then the leaven suggested to him the passover, and turning aside for a moment he applied the type of the paschal feast, so as to make his argument yet more cogent. He would urge purity upon them by every conceivable reason, and his keen eye saw an argument in the celebration of the passover. In using this type he furnishes me with another proof of the fact, that hard by any Scripture wherein you find the safety of the believer guaranteed, you are sure to see needful holiness set side by side with it. Here you have at the passover a favored people safe beneath the sprinkled blood, safe in that dire hour when the destroying angel's sword was unsheathed, but you find that people busily engaged in purging out the defiling leaven from their houses: the were not saved by purging out the leaven, but being preserved by the sprinkled blood, they were obedient to the divine precept, and diligently put away the corrupt and forbidden thing. The purity of the house from leaven went side by side with its safety by the blood.

9-13. *I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.*

I know enough of sin without looking at it There is enough knowledge of my sinfulness forced upon me by my daily temptations and failures, without my going to this place or to the other, that I may look upon sin. Do not tell me that you went into bad company just to ascertain its character. Do not tell me, young man, that, having heard a certain thing condemned, you thought you ought to see it for yourself. That will not do; that is not a believer's desire, nor a godly man's wish. He cries, "Turn away mine eyes. Lord, let me speak unto thee humbly. Am I so sinful and so weak that I have only to see a ditch, to fall into it—only to see a fire, to put my finger into it? I am not like that in other things: how is it that I am so besotted in the carnality of my mind? Yet so it is, Lord; thou knowest, and

thy servant feels that it is so.”

1 Corinthians 6

1. *Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?*

In those days, the courts of law were utterly unjust. It was all a matter of who could bribe the most, for he would gain the suit. I think that we cannot say that it is quite like this at the present time in our law courts, neither can this verse be strictly a rule for the guidance of men in these days, except that, in the spirit of Paul's words, all lawsuits among Christians should be avoided if possible.

2, 3. *Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*

Sitting with Christ, at the last great day of judgment, we shall give our "Amen" to the condemnation of the fallen spirits.

3, 4. *How much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.*

For they will be better judges than the best of worldly men. Do you set such people to judge your difficult matters? And if you do not, then why do you go to those who are even worse fitted to give a right decision?

5–11. *I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the*

unbelievers. Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? ay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortionist, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

The highest standard of holiness is set forth under the gospel. It does not come to cut down the requirements of the law, and to say, "You cannot keep the perfect law of the Lord; but do the best you can, and that will suffice." There is nothing like that in the New Testament. It does not come to men, and say, in a tone of pity, "You are poor ignorant creatures, who have unwittingly fallen into sin, and therefore there is no guilt in your transgression of the law."

11. *And such were some of you:*

They were Corinthians, and some of them had fallen into the same sad and shameful condition as the rest of the inhabitants of Corinth. Many of them had been fetched, by almighty grace, out of the very depths of the grossest sin, so that Paul, after giving a list of the blackest sinners, could add, "and such were some of you."

but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

If nobody were saved except the better sort of people, who have never openly offended, then the cavillers would say to us, "That, is a very poor religion of yours; it is suitable for the moral, and the sober, and the chaste; but what good is it to a poor fallen world where there are so many real sinners of the blackest dye?" But the Lord seems to have said, "I will stretch out my hand, and I will save some of the very chief of sinners, in order that, throughout, all time, it may be known that my gospel can effect the salvation of all sorts of sinners, even the most degraded. However depraved and fallen they may be, they cannot have

gone beyond the reach of the gospel of my Son."

12, 13. *All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient.*

There are some things that I may do; that is, I have the liberty to do them if I please; but I must also consider whether they are expedient, or whether they will damage others, and do mischief to them; for, if so, it will be better for me not to do them, because they are not expedient, even though they are lawful.

All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them.

So, on the one hand, do not make too much of abstaining from this or that, for these things, after all, are but small matters to glory in; but, on the other hand, let no man ever call himself a Christian while he is a slave to any evil habit. What says Paul? "God shall destroy both it and them." In the previous verse, he says, "I will not be brought under the power of any." The immortal spirit under the power of materialism? ay, that must never be.

Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body.

The body, then, is the Lord's. Christ died not only to save my soul, but to save my body. It is said he "came to seek and to save that which was lost." When Adam sinned he lost his body, and he lost his soul too; he was a lost man, lost altogether. And when Christ came to save his people, he came to save their bodies and their souls.

14. *And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.*

Our bodies belong to him; therefore, let us think highly of them, and never do anything to injure them; and, especially, let us take care never to let them become instruments of iniquity to the grieving of the blessed Spirit of God.

15. *Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.*

Not merely is the soul a part of Christ—united to Christ, but the body is also. These hands, these feet, these eyes, are members of Christ, if I be a child of God. I am one with him, not merely as to my mind, but one with him as to this outward frame. The very body is taken into union. The golden chain which binds Christ to his people goes round the body and soul too. Did not the apostle say "they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church?"

16, 17. *What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.*

Oh, marvellous mystery! we look into it, but who shall understand it? One with Jesus, by eternal union one, married to him; so one with him that the branch is not more one with the vine than we are a part of the Lord, our Savior, and our Redeemer.

18. *Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.*

There is no way of overcoming fornication but by flight. If the temptation attack thee, shut thine eye and stop thy ear, and away, away from it; for thou art only safe when thou art beyond sight and earshot. "Ye that love the Lord, hate evil;" and endeavor with all your might to resist and overcome it in yourselves.

19, 20. *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

Paul speaks especially of fornication as a thing not to be thought of among the saints; because the body has been valued by God at a great price, and purchased accordingly, and must not therefore be defiled by an impure conversation. Though Paul in another sense called it a “vile body,” yet it cannot be vile in all respects, for even now it is a sacred thing, the shrine of the eternal Spirit.

1 Corinthians 7

[Spurgeon never preached or commented on verses 1-13.]

14. *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.*

They are not to be viewed as the unhappy fruit of an unhallowed union, but as gifts of God, to be brought up for him, and trained in his fear. They come not as the result of uncleanness, but as gifts from the Lord, to whom marriage is an honorable estate.

15-19. *But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace. For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife? But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.*

If baptism has come in the place of circumcision, on what principle then did Paul circumcise Timothy? If this idea of the substitution of baptism for circumcision be correct, then ought not Paul to have said, “In Christ Jesus circumcision availeth nothing, neither uncircumcision, but baptism?” Ought he not to have said, “We are the circumcised; “we who have been baptized?” But what he does

say is this, “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but the keeping of the commandments of God,” and “We are the congregation who worship God in one Spirit and who rejoice in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.” Evidently, then, those who have received the Christian circumcision are those who keep the commandments of God, who worship God in the Spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and these conditions are certainly applicable to none excepting those who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

20. *Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.*

that is to say, the occupation or profession in life you were engaged in when you were converted need not be rashly abandoned. Therein you may enjoy communion with God. But if you go running before the cloud, and with presumptuous self-will get out of the path that Providence has assigned you, you will be sure to smart for it. It is ours to follow, never to lead. Where we clearly see our way, thither let us go; and unless we have that way clearly manifested to us, let us abide still in our nest.

21, 22. *Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ’s servant.*

This also applies to those who want to be always changing their situation and their acquaintance—masters never satisfied with their servants, and servants always discontented with their employers. We know many who say, “There are so many temptations in the place where I am; I will try another.” Well, I do not know, dear friends, that you are right. The temptations that trouble me I would rather endure them than encounter any fresh ones. I may know something about my weakness in the present trial, but I cannot know how I might stagger under another. I should recommend you to be rather chary of changing your trials. To exchange one trial for another is all the relief you will get in this world. All is vanity under the sun. The whole creation groaneth together. Amidst sorrow and sighing thus universal, our lot is cast.

23. *Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.*

As you are not to live for yourself, so you are not to make yourself the slave of other men, and give your powers up to any but to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not even follow good men slavishly. Do not say, “I am of Paul; I am of Apollos; I am of Calvin; I am of Wesley.” Did Calvin redeem you? Did Wesley die for you? Who is Calvin and who is Wesley but ministers by whom ye believed as the Lord gave unto you? Do not so surrender yourself to any leadership that you rather follow the man than his master. I will follow anybody if he goes Christ’s way, but I will follow nobody, by the grace of God, if he does not go in that direction. Do not pin your faith to anybody’s sleeve.

24. *Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.*

God has placed you where you are, move not till his providence calls you.

25-28. *Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.*

In writing to the Church at Corinth the apostle had to answer several questions with regard to marriage; whether, for instance, it was not better in those persecuting times, when men often had to flee suddenly from their houses, that they should remain unmarried; whether, again, supposing a person became a Christian after marriage, it was lawful for him to separate from the person with whom he was unequally yoked; and several other questions as to fitting action in certain extraordinary positions.

29. *But this I say, brethren, the time is short:*

The text does not say that time is short. That would have been a true statement. Compared with eternity, time, at the very longest, is but as a pin's point. But note what the text does say: "The time is short." It is the time of our life, the space of our opportunity, the little while we shall be upon the present stage of action, that is short.

Because time is so short, and the things of this world so frail and fleeting, it becomes us always to look at the things which are seen in their true character, and never to build substantial hopes on unsubstantial comforts, nor seek for solid joy from unreal things.

it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none;

The bride and bridegroom advance to the altar in bridal attire. The bells are ringing; crowds are cheering at the door, while overflowing mirth is supreme within. In another scene we observe domestic happiness and prosperity, a loving husband and a happy wife.

"Now," says our companion as he gazes with rapture, "This is real and enduring, I know it is; this will satisfy me; I crave for nothing more than this. Home is a word as sweet as heaven, and a healthy happy race of children is as fine a possession as even angels can desire. On this rock will I build all my hope; secure me this portion, and I cheerfully renounce the dreamy joys of religion." We whisper in his ear that all this is but a changing scene, and will by-and-bye pass away, for time is short, and wife and children are dying creatures.

30. *And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not;*

he cloudy and dark days have come. There are parents wringing their hands; a beloved child has died, and they are following its corpse to the tomb. Anon, the merchant has suffered a tremendous loss; he puts his hand to his aching head and mourns, for he knows not what will be the end of his troubles.

Sympathising deeply with our friend, we nevertheless venture to tell him that

these trials to the Christian, because they are so short and produce such lasting good, are not killing sorrows. Happy is the man whose eyes are opened to see that heirs of heaven sorrow not as those who are without hope. A real joy of heavenly origin is ever with believers, and it is but the shadow of sorrow which falls upon them.

31. *And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.*

Of everything below, it is wise for us to say, “This is not my abiding portion.” it is very necessary to say this, and to realize that, it is true, for everything here is covered with bird-lime, and the birds of paradise get stuck to it unless they are very watchful. Mind what you are doing, you prosperous people, you who have nice homes, you who are investing your money in the funds; mind that you do not get bird-limed.

There is nothing permanently for you here, after all. Your home is in heaven; your home is not here; and if you find your treasure here, your heart will be here also; but it must not be so. You must keep all earthly treasures out of your heart, and let Christ be your treasure, and let him have your heart.

32-35. *But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.*

Times of great persecution were present. Christians were continually being dragged into court, or set before the lions in the amphitheatre, or shut up in prison, or put to cruel deaths: in such circumstances few would desire to have

families about them. The Christian man who had no wife or child could flee in a moment if it was right to flee; or when he stood before the bar of Nero he had not to think within himself, “If I die, I leave a wife and fatherless children.” When the single man put on his hat he housed all his family, and thus he could move this way or that way to preach the gospel, or to escape from persecution, and his moving was no great affair such as would be involved in transporting a family from land to laud. Paul wished the church to be like an army which is not encumbered with baggage: the circumstances of the time demanded that they should be unencumbered, like troops upon forced marches. Paul himself carried all his property done up in a little bit of canvas, and it consisted of half a dozen needles and a reel of thread, with which he made tents wherever he went. He was thus without carefulness.

In those hard and desperate times it was the best possible thing that a man could do, or a woman either, to remain single: they were thus in the best condition for flight, or suffering, or service, or death. It was not a time in which they could settle down, and engage in trade or agriculture; and he therefore gives as a recommendation that they had better not then be married. If we get into such times again we will give the same advice, but we are not certain that we should speak thus today, as a general rule. The circumstances are decidedly different, and we are to follow the great principle rather than the particular instance. I have known brethren who I am sure had a great deal more care before they were married than ever they bad afterwards. Poor things that they were, they wanted somebody to look after them. I have known cases in which women have had great care and burden in their single state, and have found rest in the house of a husband; and it has been upon the whole the best for them in the truest sense: they served God better, and were freer from carefulness in the married estate. That is the rule to judge by.

36-40. *But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry. Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well. So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better. The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be*

dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord. But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.

You are to put this to the front, that you are not your own, you are bought with a price; and about this matter of marriage, as well as everything else, you are to consult the will of your Lord and Master, and you are to put this as the question, “Shall I glorify God better married or unmarried? May I hope that I shall not so greatly increase my carefulness as to distract myself from serving my Lord? There is something to be said on each side, but may I hope that the balance may be struck so that I shall really be the better servant of Christ in the marriage state? If so, I may enter upon it; but if not, I am not to gratify myself at my Savior’s expense. I may not marry if I should then cease to be as good a servant of Christ as I am now.”

1 Corinthians 8

1-3. *Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know. But if any man love God, the same is known of him.*

Sometimes the more men know the greater fools they become; for knowledge is not wisdom, though wisdom cannot be without knowledge. Knowledge in the hands of a fool is but a means of publishing his folly. Wisdom is the flower, which grows out of knowledge; but all knowledge does not bear that flower: much of it is barren.

To know is good, but to love is better. If thou wilt study, thou canst solve all problems; yet, if thou lovest not, thou hast failed to comprehend the mystery of mysteries, and to know the most excellent of sciences.

4-8. *As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.*

If the thing be not in itself a wrong thing, yet if it seem wrong to you, it will be wrong to you: therefore do it not. Paul could eat the meat that had been offered to idols without being troubled in his conscience; but there were some who thought that if they ate it they would be partakers with the idol. Paul did not think so, and, moreover, he said, “An idol is nothing in the world.” Still “he that doubteth is condemned if he eat”; if he has his doubts about it, and thinks it should not to, it must not be. He will not to practicing the art of well doing if he does that concerning which his conscience raises any scruple. If thou canst say with Scripture warrant “God permits this and I can do it, feeling that he does permit it,” thou art doing well in so doing, not else.

9-13. *But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.*

Just then the bulk of the converts were Jews, and as such, they brought into the Christian Church their former religious habits; those men who had devoutly kept the ceremonial law felt as if they would violate their consciences if they did not continue to keep its more prominent precepts; and though they gave up certain of its observances which were evidently abolished by the gospel, they kept up others, such as special days for religious fasts and feasts. Many true but weak believers were very scrupulous about what they should eat, thinking to keep up the legal distinction between meats clean and unclean.

At the same time the church had in her midst men who said, and said correctly, “The coming of Christ has done away with the old dispensation; these holy days are all types and shadows whose substance is in Christ. Has not the Lord shown to Peter, who is the minister of the circumcision, that henceforth nothing is common or unclean?” The men of strong faith blamed their weaker brethren for being superstitious, and by their superstition bringing a yoke of bondage upon themselves.

“No,” replied the weaker sort, “we were not superstitious; we are conscientious, while you go much too far in your liberty, and cause us to stumble.” Thus while the strong looked down upon the weak, almost doubting whether they could have come into the liberty of Christ at all, the weak condemned the strong, almost charging them with turning their liberty into licence. They were both wrong, for they were judging one another.

1 Corinthians 9

1-7. *Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord. Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?*

The minister who gives all his time to the preaching of the Word is entitled to a maintenance from those people amongst whom he labors. He gives divers illustrations, amongst them this—that the soldier who devotes himself to the service of his country is not expected to find his own equipment and his own rations, but he is provided for by his country. And so should it be, he teaches us, in the Church of God. The minister set apart to labor wholly in spiritual things should have temporal supplied found him.

8-10. *Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should ; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.*

Those who work for God will find him a good master. He cares for oxen, and has

commanded his Israel, “Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.” Much more doth he care for his servants who serve him. “He hath given meat unto them that fear him: he will ever be mindful of his covenant.” The reapers in Jesus’ fields shall not only receive a blessed reward at the last, but they shall have plenteous comforts by the way. He is pleased to pay his servants twice: first in the labor itself, and a second time in the labour’s sweet results.

11-15. *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.*

He insists upon it that they are not to muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn; yet, though he holds this as a great general principle, he never takes anything himself; he follows his trade of tent-making; he stitches away at the canvas, and earns his own living, so that he is chargeable unto no man. Noble example!

16. *For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!*

If a man be truly called of God to the ministry, I will defy him to withhold himself from it. A man who has really within him the inspiration of the Holy Ghost calling him to preach cannot help it. He must preach. As fire within the bones, so will that influence be until it blazes forth.

But another thing will make us preach: we shall feel that woe is unto us if we

preach not the gospel; and that is the sad destitution of this poor fallen world. Oh, minister of the gospel! stand for one moment and bethink thyself of thy poor fellow creatures! See them like a stream, rushing to eternity-ten thousand to their endless home each solemn moment fly!

17, 18. *For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.*

The apostle Paul is here giving a description of the way in which he made everything help toward the fulfillment of his desire to be a faithful minister of Jesus Christ. He longed to be the means of winning souls; he desired that, at the last, his Master might be able to say to him, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant;" And therefore, everything with which he had to do was made to bend in that direction.

19-21. *For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.*

Paul went to his work always with an intense sympathy for those he dealt with—a sympathy which made him adapt himself to each case. If he talked to a Jew, he did not begin at once blurting out that he was the apostle of the Gentiles, but he said he was a Jew, as Jew he was. He raised no questions about nationalities or ceremonies. He wanted to tell the Jew of him of whom Isaiah said, "'He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," in order that he might believe in Jesus and so be saved. If he met a Gentile, the apostle of the Gentiles never showed any of the squeamishness which might have been expected to cling to him on account of his Jewish education. He ate as

the Gentile ate, and drank as he did, sat with him, and talked with him; was, as it were, a Gentile with him; never raising any question about circumcision or uncircumcision, but solely wishing to tell him of Christ, who came into the world to save both Jew and Gentile, and to make them one. If Paul met with a Scythian, he spoke to him in the Barbarian tongue, and not in classic Greek. If he met a Greek, he spoke to him as he did at the Areopagus, with language that was fitted for the polished Athenian. He was all things to all men, that he might by all means save some.

So with you, Christian people: your one business in life is to lead men to believe in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and every other thing should be made subservient to this one object; if you can but get them saved, everything else will come right in due time. Mr. Hudson Taylor, a dear man of God, who has labored much in Inland China, finds it helpful to dress as a Chinaman, and wear a pigtail. He always mingles with the people, and as far as possible lives as they do. This seems to me to be a truly wise policy.

If we can put ourselves on a level with those whose good we seek, we shall be more likely to effect our purpose than if we remain aliens and foreigners, and then talk of love and unity. To sink myself to save others is the idea of the apostle. To throw overboard all peculiarities, and yield a thousand indifferent points, in order to bring men to Jesus, is our wisdom if we would extend our Master's kingdom. Never may any whim or conventionality of ours keep a soul from considering the gospel—that were horrible indeed. Better far to be personally inconvenienced by compliance with things indifferent, than to retard a sinner's coming by quarrelling about trifles.

22. *To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*

It has pleased God to save souls by his people, and therefore he places in them a sacred longing by all means to save some. He might if he had pleased have called all his chosen to himself by a voice out of the excellent glory, just as he called Saul the persecutor; or he might have commissioned angels to fly throughout the length and breadth of the world, and carry the message of mercy; but in his inscrutable wisdom he has been pleased to bring men to himself by men. The atonement is complete, and the Spirit's power is fully given; all that is needed is that men be led to believe for the salvation of their souls, and this part

of salvation is accomplished by the Holy Ghost through the ministries of men.

23, 24. *And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?*

No matter if twenty or a hundred had entered for the race, "but one receiveth the prize." Alas! out of these who appear to be running in the Christian ministry, how many will be prize-takers at the last? And out of those who seem to be running the race of the Christian life, how many will win the prize? Ah, Lord, thou knowest!

So run, that ye may obtain.

Do not speculate about what others will do, or not do, but see to your own running: "So run that ye may obtain." Salvation is all of grace; but when a man is saved, he still has to run the Christian race and to be a runner as long as he lives."

25. *And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.*

Here Paul is alluding to the athletic games and pugilistic encounters of the time. It was a matter of common notoriety that every man, who was going to fight, or wrestle, or run, had to get himself into proper condition—to "go into training," as we say in similar cases nowadays.

26. *Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.*

The athletes who completed in the Grecian games, passed through great self-denials and mortifications of the flesh, in order that every part of their bodily frame might be tough and strong when they came forward to wrestle, or to run, or to fight. "Now," says Paul, "if they do all that to gain a crown of parsley,"—which was generally the grown given—truly," a corruptible grown,"—"how

much more ought we to do in order to win a grown that fadeth not away—‘an incorruptible crown’!”

26. *I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:*

He would not leave a stone unturned, as it were, that he might gain the prize; he put out all his strength in the name of the Lord.

27. *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection:*

The Greek word, according to some, implies getting his body into the same position as a man does, when, in a pugilistic encounter, he gets his adversary’s head under his arm, and smites him with all his might, So Paul says concerning his body, “I bring it into subjection and take care that it feels the full force of my will.” According to other interpreters, the verse may be read, “I drag my body off as a cave;” just as in some of those ancient fights, the victors dragged away their antagonists as slaves, Paul accounted his body to be as a slave to his soul, and dragged it behind him in chains.

lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be castaway.

The Greek word, which is translated “a castaway” is “adokimos.” It might better have been rendered “disapproved.” It certainly has no such meaning as that which has been generally given to it. Paul was not afraid of being cast away by God at the last. What he aimed at was this—as he had entered the lists, as a Christian minister, to fight for Christ, to wrestle against principalities and powers, to seek to win souls for Christ, he must keep his bodily powers and passions so in subjection that, at the last, when the prizes were distributed, he would be found to have won his. This is quite another matter from being “a castaway” from salvation and eternal life. Paul was saved and he knew it; and some of us know, to a certainty, that we are saved; but we also know that there is another crown to be won, which the Lord will give to his servants who win in the great fight with sin.

To win this grown is our high ambition and we long to hear the Master say to each one of us, in that day, “Well; done, thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler other many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

1 Corinthians 10

1–4. *Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of the spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ.*

The history of Israel in coming out of Egypt was a very instructive type of the history of the visible Church of Christ. They were in slavery in Egypt as all men are in bondage to sin and Satan. They were brought oat of Egypt as all the redeemed are delivered by the almighty grace of God. With a high hand and an outstretched arm, the Lord brought Israel out of the house of bondage; and, by a very wonderful baptism, “in the cloud and in the sea,” they commenced their career as God’s separated people. Then they all shared in the same spiritual ordinances: “They did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink.” Yet, for all that, they were not all God’s people. They were so nominally, and visibly; but they were not all really so. And, as there was a mixed multitude that came up out of Egypt, together with the true seed of promise, so is there an alien element in every church at this present day. Among those who have been baptized into Christ, there are still some who, while they eat the spiritual meat and drink the spiritual drink, yet for all that have not been brought into true communion with Christ, and do not in reality know the Lord.

5. *But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.*

There was no evidence of faith in many of them, and “without faith it is impossible to please God.” Is it not a sad thing that, in a people so highly

favored as they were, there should have been so large a proportion of those who had not the faith which renders men pleasing unto God? So they did literally come out into the wilderness to die there, and they never entered into the rest of God.

6. *Now these things were our examples*

Or, warnings, for just as they were overthrown in the wilderness, so may we be, notwithstanding all the gospel privileges which we enjoy, if we are not true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. If the life of Christ is not in our souls, all the privileges of the Church of God cannot save us. “These things were our examples,”

to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

They gave way to their carnal appetites; they craved for mesh when God had already given them angels’ food. Now, if we act like this, we cannot be pleasing unto God.

7. *Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.*

That is, to go through those unclean rites and ceremonies before their idols which are here called. “play.” As, dear friends, may God keep us from the worship of anything which we can see with our eyes, or hear with our ears!

Stay we never become idolaters! You know, we can very easily mate idols of our children; we can make idols of our own persons, we can make idols of our talents, of our respectability, and so forth. Rut, oh! it matters not what the idol is; it is no more pleasing to God if it be of silver and gold than if it were of the mud of the river. No: “Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them.”

8. *Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.*

Fornication in God's people is peculiarly black and filthy. In the ordinary man of the world, it is evil enough; but when a man professes to be a Christian, he must flee from even the very thought of it, and keep himself chaste, for his body is a temple of the Holy Ghost. Oh, may none of us ever come anywhere near to this great evil, but in purity of heart may we walk before our God!

9. *Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.*

I cannot stay to mention the many ways in which we can tempt Christ; but we can readily do so still. What a dreadful doom it was to be destroyed by serpents! Yet is it not very wonderful that, in connection with this great sin, and its awful punishment, the brazen serpent was lifted high, that whosoever looked to it might live? And now, if any have tempted Christ by presumptuous sin, by their delay, or by their infidelity, let them bless God that they are not yet destroyed of serpents, because Christ has been lifted up even as the serpent of brass was exalted above the camp of Israel.

Remember our Lord's words to Nicodemus: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whoesever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

10. *Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.*

It is a dreadful habit to get into—that of complaining against God. Occasional murmuring is doubtless sinful, but habitual murmuring becomes a very great evil. I am afraid that there are some who cavil at God's providence, and cavil at his Word, till they come to be cavillers and nothing else; and what good is a man who can do nothing else but carp, and cavil, and criticize? O beloved, "neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer."

11. *Now all these things happened unto them for example; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

The apostle has told us that before, but he tells it to us again, to warn us, by these beacons, lest we come to a similar destruction to that which befell those ancient unbelievers.

12. *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*

We also are to take heed lest we fall, especially those of us who think we are standing securely. You have seen how terrible was the fate of those unbelievers in the wilderness, who never entered into Canaan, but left their carcases in the desert; now Paul urges us, with such beacons to warn us, to take heed lest we also fall as they did.

13. *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man:*

The children of God are all subject to temptation; some of them are tempted more than others, but I an persuaded that there is not one, except those who are too young to be conscious of evil, who will enter heaven without having endured some temptation. If any one could have escaped, surely it would have been “the firstborn among many brethren;” but you will remember how he was led of the Spirit, straight from the waters of his baptism, into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil; and the apostle Paul informs us that he “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”

There is no sin in being tempted. The sin is that of the tempter, not of the tempted. If you resist the temptation, there is something praiseworthy about your action. There is nothing praiseworthy about the temptation; that is evil, and only evil; but you did not tempt yourself, and he that tempted you must bear the blame of the temptation.

I know that you are tempted to think that you are a lone traveler on a road that nobody has ever traversed before you; but if you carefully examine the track, you can discover the footprints of some of the best of God’s servants who have passed along that wearisome way. It is a very dark lane, you say—one that might truly be called, “Cut-throat Lane.” Ah! but you will find that apostles have been along that way, confessors have been that way, martyrs have been that way, and the best of God’s saints have been tempted just as you now are.

but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able;

“God is faithful”! Therefore, He is true to his promise. Even Balaam said, “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” One of God’s promises is, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee;” “God is faithful,” so he will fulfill that promise.

Notice, next, that not only is God faithful, but He is master of the situation, so that he can keep his promise. Note what the text says: “Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear.” Then you could not have been tempted if God had not suffered it to happen to you. God is far mightier than Satan. The devil could not touch Job except by divine permission, neither can he try and tempt you except as God allows him; he must have a permit from the King of kings before he can tempt a single saint.

but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

There is a proper way to escape from a temptation. There are twenty improper ways; and woe to the man who makes use of any one of them; but there is only one proper way out of a trial, and that is the straight way, the way that God has made for his people to travel.

God has planned it all, how you, his champion, shall go forth, and fight valiantly in his strength; and how he will be your shield and your exceeding great reward. He will lead you into the dangerous defile; but then he can see the way out of it as well as the way into it, and he will take you safely through. Did not the psalmist sing, “To him which led his people through the wilderness: for his mercy endureth for ever”? He not only led them into the wilderness, but he led them through it, blessed be his holy name!

14. *Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.*

Keep as far from it as ever you can. I remember reading of a man of God who was the rector of a certain parish, and who had in the church a very ancient sad

famous painted window of which he was somewhat proud. In the design there was a representation of the Godhead—the Father was there, and oh, how blasphemous!—he was represented as an aged man; and, one day, this clergyman, who had seen no evil in the window, heard a rustic explaining to a companion that that was the God whom they worshipped. The rector did not deliberate for a moment, but he threw a stone right through that part of the painted window. I suppose that was an offense against the law of man, but certainly it was not against the law of God. He would never have that figure replaced on any account whatever, and I think that he did well: "Dearly beloved, flee from idolatry." Put it out of your sight; do not tamper with it, but hate it with a perfect hatred. In God's eyes, it is one of the most fearful of sins. He has said, "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God," and he will have nothing to come between us and the pure and simple worship of his invisible self.

15, 16. *I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*

The teaching of the Lord's supper is just this—that while we have many ways of communion with Christ, yet the receiving of Christ into our souls as our Saviour is the best way of communion with him.

We, being guilty, accept of his atonement as our sacrificial cleansing, and in token thereof we eat this bread and drink this cup. "Oh!" says one, "I do not feel that I can get near to Christ. He is so high and holy, and I am only a poor sinner." Just so. For that very reason you can have fellowship with Christ in that which lies nearest to his heart; he is a Saviour, and to be a Saviour there must be a sinner to be saved. Be you that one, and Christ and you shall at on be in union and communion; he shall save, and you shall be saved; he shall sanctify, and you shall be sanctified, and twain shall thus be one.

17. *For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.*

Here on the table you have the tokens of the broadest and fullest communion. This is a kind of communion which you and I cannot choose or reject, if we are

in Christ, it is and must be ours. Certain brethren restrict their communion in the outward ordinance, and they think they have good reasons for doing so; but I am unable to see the force of their reasoning, because I joyfully observe that these brethren commune with other believers in prayer, and praise and hearing of the Word, and other ways; the fact being that the matter of real communion is very largely beyond human control, and is to the spiritual body what the circulation of the blood is to the natural body—a necessary process not dependent upon volition.

Here, in the common reception of the one loaf, we bear witness that we are one; and in the actual participation of all the chosen in the one redemption that unity is in very deed displayed arid matured in the most substantial manner. Washed in the one blood, fed on the same loaf, cheered by the same cup, all differences pass away, and "we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

18, 19. *Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing?*

After they had offered the beasts as sacrifices to their idols, it was the custom to sell the carcases in the shambles. Christian men, going into the market to buy meat, and asking no questions, bought and ate portions of these sacrifices, and they did no wrong whatever. But there were some in the church who were very tender of conscience, and who said, "If we eat meat which has been offered to idols, we thereby become partakers with the idolaters." Paul therefore writes:

20, 21. *But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils:*

It cannot be; there must be a separation between these two things. We cannot have any delight in idol-worship, and yet worship the Christ of God.

21–28. *Ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of*

devil? Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever, is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof:

So, you see, you may eat the meat if you like, for the idol is nothing at all; but, still, if you are told that it is meat that has been offered to idols, and that you by eating of it seem to join in the worship of idols, abstain from doing it, not for your own sake, but for the sake of the man who might be caused to stumble through you. This is a safe rule with regard to Christian behavior in many other things. There may be things lawful in drink as well as in meat, which a man may take without sinning; but if he knows that his example leads others astray, then let him take heed that he does not set such an example. An example which is an excuse for drunkenness is not a good one; therefore, let none of us set it before the eyes of men. If any man say to you, "This meat has been offered in sacrifice to idols," "eat not for his sake that shewed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

29. *Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?*

That man may not be able to do it without injury to himself, but I may, and I have liberty so to do; but yet, as a Christian man, I am to consider his want of power, and I am not to use my liberty lest I do harm to my brother.

30, 31. *For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

The Christian man can make every meal a sacrament, and his ordinary avocations the exercise of his spiritual priesthood. The Christian is no more a common man than was the altar a common place. It is as great a sacrilege for the believer to live unto himself, or to live unto the world, as you and I could have profaned the most holy place, used the holy fire for our own kitchen, or the censer for common perfume, or the candlestick for our own chamber. These things were God's, none might venture to appropriate them, and we are God's and must be used only for Him. Oh, Christians, would that ye could know this! Ye are Christ's men, God's men; servants of God through Jesus Christ. Ye are not to do your own works, ye are not to live for your own objects.

32, 33. *Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*

We all know what the missionary spirit is, and yet we could not any of us exactly describe it. It is a sort of thing that sets a man longing to see others saved, and makes him pant especially for those who have no means of grace in their own lands, that they may have those means carried to them, that they may be saved.

1 Corinthians 11

1, 2. *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.*

While we are children, we are necessarily under instructors; but we must take heed, as we grow in grace, that we never follow an instructor so blindly as to follow him where he goes wrong. No, “to the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them.” Every true instructor will beg you to see that, when he errs, you are not to err with him, but to keep a conscience and an understanding of your own, so that it will not be said, “These are they who follow this or that eminent preacher or divine;” but, “These are they which follow the Lamb.”

3-16. *But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as*

the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

This is how it stands: the woman with the man for her head, the man with Christ for his Head, and Christ with God for his Head. Such is the Scriptural order—an order which has been disturbed all through except with regard to the Father and the Son, for God has ever been the Head of Christ. Now, Christ has come into the world to restore that right order from the bottom right up to the top; and it is to be so restored, first, by Christ becoming the Head of men, when he shall have put down all his enemies under his feet, and when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power, "for he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

17. *Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.*

It is a very bad state of things when we meet for worship, and separate without any improvement, or, like these Corinthians, "come together, not for the better, but for the worse."

18. *For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.*

It was very gracious and kind on the apostle's part to put it so mildly, and he sets us the example of not believing anything against our brethren too quickly: "I partly believe it."

19, 20. *For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come*

together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.

Merely meeting together, each person bringing his or her own portion of bread and wine, and each one eating the provided portion, was not celebrating the Lord's supper.

21. *For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.*

They seem to have regarded it as a common feast, to which they brought their own provisions; and, without waiting for each other, they disgraced the table of the Lord by their scandalous proceedings.

22. *What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?*

There is your proper place if you want a meal. Go home, and eat and drink; do not come to the sanctuary for such a purpose: "Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in?"

or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?

"Making the poor who come to the gathering feel their poverty By observing the superiority of your provisions to their own."

What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.

No doubt they hoped to be praised, and expected that they had done everything in the right way; perhaps, they even believed that they were acting under the inspiration of the Spirit, and therefore could not do anything wrong; but the apostle deals very faithfully with them, and tells them how the supper is to be celebrated. How much we have gained by the mistakes of others! As the inspired apostle is guided to inform us as to the right mode of observing this ordinance, we may almost be thankful that the Corinthians fell into error concerning it, much as we may regret their faults on their own account.

23. *For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you,*

—That is the right kind of teaching which a man first receives from God, and then delivers to the people. Nothing is of authority in the Christian ministry unless we can say of it, “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you,”—

that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread;

What a pathetic interest is given to the Lord’s supper by the fact that it was instituted “the same night in which he was betrayed.” Never forget that God grant that none of us may betray our Lord this night, or any other night! It would be the darkest night in our life should it ever be so: “The Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread;”—

24. *And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.*

The Lord’s supper is a simple service of remembrance. Nothing is said about an altar, or a priest, or a sacrifice. Our Lord took bread, gave thanks for it, brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take, eat: this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.” Mark that “this do”; it will not be right to do something else instead of this; and we must not do this for any other purpose than the one he mentions, “This do in remembrance of me.” This command raises a previous question, “Do we know him?” we cannot remember Christ if we do not know him.

25. *After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped,*

That is to say, after the same manner of thanksgiving, blessing God for the fruit of the vine, which was henceforth to be the emblem of his poured-out blood.

saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

From which we learn that only those who know him must come to his table, for how shall we remember what we never knew? And how shall we remember him with whom we have never spoken, and in whom we have never believed. You are not to come to the Lord's supper to get faith; you must have faith first, or else you have no right to draw nigh to this sacred spot. What do ye here?

26. *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

"Show" or "proclaim." The latter is the better word: "Ye do proclaim the Lord's death till he come." That last phrase ought finally to settle the question of the perpetuity of the Lord's supper, which is to be observed "till he come."

27. *Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.*

If such a man has treated "this bread" and "this cup" with contempt, he has treated "the body and blood of the Lord" with contempt; it shall be so reckoned to him. Many have been trouble by this verse. They have said, "We are unworthy." You are, this is quite true; but the text does not say anything about your being unworthy. Paul uses an adverb, not an adjective.

His words are, "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily," that is, in an unfit way, to gain something by it, as men used to take what they called "the sacrament" to get into certain offices, or as some come to the communion-table for the sake of the charitable gifts that are for the poor of the church; this is to eat and drink "unworthily." To come carelessly, to come contemptuously, to say, "I do not care whether I am a Christian, or not; but I shall come to the communion," this is to eat and drink "unworthily."

28. *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

Paul does not say, “Let a man examine himself, and then not eat or drink at the communion.” The examination should lead him to repentance, and to faith, and should then bring him to the table of fellowship in the right state of mind and heart. The examination is not a door to shut him out from the ordinance, but a door at which he may pause awhile, to see whether he is in a right condition to enter; and if he is not, he should seek to be made so, and then enter.

29. *For he that eateth, and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.*

He does not see the meaning of the emblem of Christ’s death. He degrades the symbol by making it take the place of the thing signified. He sees the bread, but not the body; and he damnifies himself, condemns himself, by such eating. He is a loser rather than a gainer by eating and drinking unworthily.

30. *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.*

There is no doubt that God visited upon the Corinthians, in the way of chastisement, their want of reverence at his table; many were weak and sickly among them, and many died. They were not lost if they were believers in Christ, but the church at Corinth sustained a great loss through their departure; and I have no doubt that God still exercises a singular discipline over his own people. They that are without are, to a large extent, left to sin as they please; their punishment will fall upon them hereafter; but the child of God cannot be allowed to do so, and he shall be chastened for his sin. The Lord still says to his spiritual Israel, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.” A father may let another man’s child alone, but his own boy shall not transgress without smarting for it. Such conduct as is here described does not bring damnation, for there is no damnation to them that are in Christ Jesus; but it does bring the chastening with which God visits his children when they walk contrary to him.

31. *For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.*

If we are God’s people, we shall be judged by him here for our wrongdoing. We

shall not be like the world that is left to the day of judgment; but we shall be judged now. But when a church has lost its conscience, and gets into such a state as this Corinthian church fell into, then, as it does not judge itself, God judges it, and chastens it severely.

32. *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.*

So, you see, that chastening process, which is going on in the church, is all in love: “that we should not be condemned with the world;“just as a father exercises discipline in his household, and uses chastisement that his children may never disobey the laws of the realm. They will never come before the police court, for they are kept under proper control at home, and are tutored and trained by their father’s wise government. So we come not under the judgment of the law, as the world itself comes; we come under the disciplinary treatment of the great Head of the Church, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

33, 34. *Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.*

How gently Paul talks to these Corinthians! They deserve to be scolded; but he is very tender with them. He says, “If you must come together in this way, at least have the good manners to stop for one another; and if you do come to the communion of the Lord, treat it with that respect and reverence which it deserves.

1 Corinthians 12

1, 2. *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.*

Although the members of the church at Corinth were highly favored with spiritual gifts, they do not seem to have known how to use them. Paul points out to them, in this chapter, how ignorant they were concerning the very gifts which they possessed. They did not know how to put them to proper' use in the service of God. The apostle therefore reminds these gift-exalted Corinthians that, only a little while before, they were heathens, carried away by falsehood and superstition, and worshipping dumb idols. They had nothing, therefore, to boast of; and it is probable that, if we also look back to the hole of the pit whence we were dug, we shall find no more occasion for boasting than they had.

3. *Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed:*

I suppose that, in their assemblies, where everybody talked who liked, there were some people who even spoke blasphemy. They professed to be under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and yet they stood up, and called Jesus accursed. Where there is no rule nor order, there is pretty sure to be something very mischievous before long. Paul gives them to understand that this kind of talk could not go unrebuked.

and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.

If a man really knows Jesus as his Lord, and he declares that truth, then you may fully accept it as being in harmony with the teaching of the Spirit of God

4–7. *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

It is given in order that he may himself profit, and also that he may be the means of profiting those who hear him.

8. *For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom;*

He is prudent—an experienced man-fit to lead the young, and the feeble, and those who are less instructed than he himself is.

to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

He has a wide range of practical acquaintance with God's Word; and though he may not be so judicious as the brother who was just mentioned, yet he is a man of knowledge.

9-11. *To another faith by the same Spirit;*

Paul probably means here some special kind of faith; perhaps, the faith that enabled its possessor to work miracles.

to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits:

So that he is able to detect the impostors who come even into the nominal Church of Christ. They did come then, and they will continue to come even to the end.

to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of

tongue: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Whatever our gifts as a church, or as individuals, may be, they all come from the selfsame Spirit. This should tend to promote unity amongst us. Let us all trace whatever gift we have to the hand that gave it, and to the Spirit that wrought it; let us feel that we are so many pipes connected with one fountain; and, therefore, as all the good that we convey comes from the one source, let us give all the honor and glory of it to the Spirit of God from Whom it comes.

12. *For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.*

That, is to say, Christ visible—the Church of Christ. We are members of his mystical body. He is the Head; but all who are quickened by the Spirit of God are one with him.

13. *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

Oh, what a sacred oneness that is which subsists between all the Lord's people! We are not simply brethren, but we are one; we are not allied by affinity, but by actual identity; we are parts of the same body; we are brought into spiritual membership with each other, as real and as effectual as that membership which subsists between the various parts of the body. Yet we are not all alike, although we are all of one body; some are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are bond, some are free; and yet, in some things, we are all alike, for we have all been baptized by one Spirit. And, moreover, we have all been made to drink into one Spirit; we have had one spiritual baptism, and we have had one spiritual drinking. Would to God that we felt more one, that our hearts beat more in tune with each other; that we had a sympathy with each other in woes and sufferings; that we had a fellow feeling with all who love the Lord; and could at all times weep with those that weep, as well as rejoice with those that rejoice.

14. *For the body is not one member, but many.*

By the way in which some people act, you might almost imagine that the body was one member, and that the one member was a tongue; but it is not so. God never intended that, in the assembly, all should speak. Let those speak to whom he has given the power to speak. He does not lay all burdens upon one back; let each man bear the personal burden Which God has placed upon his back.

15. *If the foot shall say, Because I can not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?*

Where are you, dear child of God, who are in the position of the foot? Have you been comparing yourself with some eminent Christian, who did much in his Master's service; and have you sorrowfully asked, "Why can not I do what he did? I am only a poor foot, always touching the ground, often limping, and frequently needing to be washed." Well, suppose you could be made into a hand, it might be a gain to you in some respects, but it might be a loss to the rest of the body. It would certainly be a loss to any of you if your feet were to be turned into hands, for you have need of feet; and the Church, which is here called by the name of Christ, needs its feet as much as it needs its hands.

The mercy is that even if you have, in your anxiety—perhaps I ought to say, in your unbelief—been saying, "Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body," it does not matter what you have said, for that does not alter the fact. "Is it therefore not of the body?" Of course, it is of the body skill, whatever it may say.

16. *And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?*

Oh, by no means! The ear has its proper purpose to fulfill; it is designed for a special service in the body, which no other member can render. We must never compare ourselves among ourselves, and wish to be somebody else.

You are bad enough as you are, dear friend, but you would probably be much worse if you were somebody else. You may think that you are a very poor ear, but you would decidedly make a much worse eye. Even if your ear is dull of hearing, it can, at any rate, hear better than it can see. It can do its own work

better than it could do the work of any other member of the body; and so can you as a member of Christ's mystical body.

17. *If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing?*

If we were all preachers, if we could all see into God's truth, and set it forth in a public manner, where should we get our congregations?

If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

There must be different members to fill different offices. If we were all so one that there was no distinction whatever, if we were all of one rank, all of one age, all of one standing, the body would be incomplete.

18. *But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.*

That is the best rule for each part of our body: "as it hath pleased him." Could any of you suggest a better place for your eyes than where they are? We have read the old heathen fable of a giant who had one eye in the middle of his forehead; and whenever I have seen his portrait sketched by fancy, I have felt at once, that it was no improvement upon the human face. No, the eye is best where it is; so is the ear, and so is the mouth. They are all best just where they are. So are you, my brother or my sister, best where you are, if you are in the place where God evidently meant you to be.

19. *And if they were all one member, where were the body?*

There would be no body at all

20, 21. *But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee:*

You know how very quick the hand always is to go up to the eye when it is in

danger You do not have to wait to tell it what to do; but, in an instant, the hand is up, for there is a fellow feeling between the members of the same body. “The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee.”

And the hand never feels that it may leave the eye to take care of itself; it is ready at once to protect it.

nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

You sometimes think there are some belonging to the Church whom we could well spare; but there is not one superfluous member in the whole body. If they be truly united to Christ, they have all their offices, all their places. There is not a poor old woman, who has not been able to get up to the house of prayer for several years, who is not of some use to the Church; for she lies upon her bed, and there she intercedes with God.

There is not: a member of the Church so humble, so illiterate, so uninstructed, that he or she may not be of essential service to the whole body. There is some little part, my brother, which you are to take in the great Church of Christ; you may not be able always to tell what it may be, but still there is a place for you to fill. There is a linchpin in a chariot; who thinks much about or thanks that pin? Indeed, it is so very small and insignificant, who would imagine it is necessary to the locomotion or speed? The wheels carry it round, but who would suppose that, if it were taken away, the wheel would fly off? Perhaps you are like one of these little linchpins which keep the wheel right; you may not know what use you are; but, possibly, you prevent someone else from turning aside. Let us each keep in our station, endeavoring, God helping us, to exert the influence which he has given us.

22, 23. *Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.*

They are covered and concealed; and so we take more trouble with them than we do with other parts of our body.

24. *For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked:*

Here is a lesson for us with regard to church-fellowship—always to take most notice of those who are the least noticeable, and to be most gentle with those who require the most tenderness. You know that there are some of our fellow-members who are not all we should like them to be. We believe that they are children of God; but they are, somehow or other, "cut on the cross." They are crotchety, and weak in many ways. Now, we should try, as far as ever we can, to adapt ourselves to them. If you have ever had the gout very badly, you know that, if a person walks across the room too heavily, you feel it. Do you, therefore, say to your father, when he is thus laid aside, "You cannot expect me to take notice of such a thing as that? Nor would you be so cruel as to say to anybody else, "If he has a gouty foot, I cannot help it, and I shall tread on it every now and then."

No; you are not so brutal as that. So, if there be a member of the body that is more tender than the rest, and especially if that tenderness is the result of disease, let us try to minister to it as far as ever we possibly can. Let us give "more abundant honor to that part which lacked."

25, 26. *That thee should be no schism in the body;*

That is, no division, no rent in the body. We have heard this text urged by some who are in the Church of England as a proof that we are wrong in departing from it. They tell us that there should be no schism in the body; we beg to tell them that there is no schism in the body that we know of. We do not belong to their body, and therefore we make no schism in that body, we are quite clear of them. We have neither stick, nor stone, nor part, nor lot in their State Establishment; therefore we do not create a schism in the body. When they divide themselves into Puseyites and Evangelicals, they make a schism in their own body; but, as long as we are all united, as long as the members of a church walk together in unity, there is no schism in the body. We are different bodies altogether. They say that a schismatic is one who departs from a Church, and makes a rent from it; by no means, a schismatic is one who makes a rent in it, not from it. We, I say, are not schismatics. Those who are in the Church, and yet do not agree with its

fundamental principles and its Articles of Faith, they are schismatics; but we are not.

but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.

I am afraid that this second half of the verse refers to a duty which is more neglected than is the other. It is an easier thing to suffer with those that suffer than it is to rejoice with those that rejoice; and I will tell you why it is so; because, in giving compassion to those that suffer, you have some sense of dignity. Condescension is often a sort of pride; but when a brother is better off than you are—when he has more talent than you have—when he is more successful than you are—for you to go and rejoice with him, and Be as glad as if it were all your own gladness—ay, to enter into his joy, and say, "God be thanked, my brother, for thy prosperity! I would increase it if I could, for I feel that I am a partner with you;"—ah! this needs great grace. So, may God give us more grace continually, and deliver us from everything like envy, which is of Satan, and yet is all too common even among professing Christians.

27–30. *Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*

Christ is our Head, and the Head specially suffers with the members. I do not know whether it is always so clear that one hand suffers with another hand, as it is clear that the head suffers with either hand. So is it with the church. It may not always be clear that all the members sympathize with each other, but it is always clear that Christ sympathizes with each one of his people.

28-30. *And God hath set some in the church, first apostles,*

It appears, according to the apostle Paul that, according to the diversity of gifts, which proceeded from the selfsame Spirit of God, those who gave assistance to the early church, did so in different ways. He tells us that "God hath set some in the church, first apostles." These were to go from place to place founding churches and ordaining ministers. There were next,

secondarily prophets,

some of whom uttered prophecies, and others were gifted in their explanation. Then came,

thirdly teachers,

who were probably either pastors settled in divers churches teaching the Word, or else evangelists journeying about and proclaiming the truth. Then came,

after that miracles,

We have not all the spiritual gifts which were entrusted to the first Christian Church; I do not suppose it would have been wise that we should have had them. The gift of miracles, for instance, if it had continued in the Church, would have attracted the notice of men rather to the supernatural power of God than to the moral and spiritual power of Christ Jesus our Savior as manifested through the Divine Spirit. This great, spiritual battle between right and wrong, which is being fought out in the arena of the world, God never intended to be fought out by mere might and power through the dazzling display of signs and wonders; but he resolved to win the victory by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit: according to that word unto Zerubbabel, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” He intended to work in a spiritual manner upon the hearts of men, and therefore he dispensed with the aid of miracles, which had been necessary in the first stage of the Church’s growth. You have no doubt often seen, in the case of a young tree when it is newly planted, that a stout stake is driven in by the side of it, and the sapling is tied to that stake; but when the tree grows bigger and stronger, it needs no such support. So has it been with the Church of Christ on earth. At first it was feeble, and needed to be upheld and sustained by the aid of miracles, and wonders, and signs; but it needs that aid no longer.

then gifts of healings,

How far the gifts of healing may still remain in the Church. I should not like to be forced to say—either to say that they remain, lest any should be led into

fanaticism; or to say that they are utterly gone, lest I should be denying some things which, at any rate, look like facts. God does, I doubt not, still hear the ‘believing prayers of his servants concerning the sick; at least, in certain cases, and still should it be, as I judge, an ordinance to be observed, “Is any sick among you? let, him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up.”

helps,

Now, who these people precisely were, I suppose it would be very difficult, at this period of time, if not quite impossible, to tell. Some have thought that they were assistant-ministers, who occasionally aided settled pastors, both in the pastoral work of visiting, and also in occasionally preaching the Word. Others have thought that they were assistant-deacons, and perhaps even deaconesses, an office that most certainly was recognized in the apostolic churches. Others, again, have supposed these helps to have been attendants in the sanctuary, who took care that strangers were properly accommodated, and managed those detail, which always must be superintended by somebody in connection with any gathering of persons for any public object whatever.

But whoever they were, or whatever may have been the particular functions they discharged, they appear to have been a useful body of people, and worthy to be mentioned in the same verse as apostles and teachers, and even to be named with miracle-workers, and those who had the gifts of healing. It strikes me that they were not persons who had any official standing, but that they were only moved by the natural impulse and the divine life within them to do anything and everything which would assist either teacher, pastor, or deacon, in the work of the Lord. They were the sort of brethren who are useful anywhere, who can always stop a gap, and who are only too glad when they find that they can make themselves serviceable to the church of God in any capacity whatever.

governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

God intended that there should be different offices in his Church; let us look on

each other as being different, and yet united in the common faith of Christ.

31. *But covet earnestly the best gifts:*

I would not wish you, brother, to repress your aspirations after these blessings; I am most anxious that you should earnestly desire and seek to possess a large share of all these spiritual endowments.

Paul is not speaking here concerning ordinary gifts as we see them in men of the world who are gifted in various ways; but he is referring to spiritual gifts—gifts which we dare to ask of God, gifts which we may expect the Spirit of God to bestow upon us, gifts which can be used in the Church of Christ, and which we desire to possess in order that we may use them to the glory of God.

31. *And yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. Which is, holding the truth in love, and walking in charity one toward another.*

Get gifts, spiritual gifts, but also get grace; and, above all, get the best grace, the noblest grace, the greatest grace; that is, love, for love to God, and love to your fellow-men, and love to the Church of God—this is “a more excellent way.”

By all means covet the best gifts, as an artist would wish to be deft with all his limbs and quick with all his senses; but above all, cherish love, as that same artist would cultivate the pure taste which lives and breathes within him—the secret spring of all his motions, the faculty that prompts his skill. Learn to esteem this sacred instinct of love beyond all the choicest endowments. However poor you may be in talents, let the love of Christ dwell in you richly.

1 Corinthians 13

1. *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling symbol.*

If there be no love to God, and no love to man, the vital element is wanting. Whatever sound we make if the Word of God is not in us, it is a sound that has no meaning, conveys no heavenly meaning. “I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” What if any of us who bear witness for Christ with our tongues should be found to be no better than this?

2. *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*

Judas had, no doubt, faith in God’s miracles, but yet he was not saved. Selfishness was his ruling motive; he had no love to God or man. How this clips the wings of those lofty ones who hover on high, boasting of their knowledge and of their gifts! Thee are many who have few gifts—obscure and unknown—who love God much, and these are the accepted ones. Before God the balances of the sanctuary are rather turned by the shekel of love, than by any weight of talent or position.

3. *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

Love is a matter of the—heart, and if the heart be not right with God, external acts, though they are very similar to the highest acts that flow from love, are of

no service. God requires the heart to be right, and if that be not right, whatever cometh out of us is not acceptable in his sight.

God grant us grace, then, that we may abound in this most excellent grace of a true Christian life, which is infinitely more essential than the highest gifts or the most remarkable talents that God himself can bestow upon us?

4, 5. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil.*

Always try to put the best construction on other people's actions and work. Let gentleness triumph.

6, 7. *Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

Grace alone makes believers press forward in their work of love, seeking with gentleness to win souls. Oh to say—though the wicked man curse me, and foam at the mouth with rage, I will still seek his good. This is the victory of faith, but the battle will test all your graces, and make you see that all is not gold which glitters. You will soon see whether the Spirit of God be in you or not, for patient love is not natural, but supernatural, and only he who is filled with the supernatural indwelling of the Holy Spirit will be able to live as a sheep among wolves.

8, 9. *Charity never faileth:*

He that loves possesses a coin that is current in the skies. He shall go on to love for ever. When the sun shall be darkened, and the stars shall fall from heaven, like withered leaves, he that loves Jesus shall still go on to love, and find in that love his heaven.

but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish

away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

It is only in a small measure that we come into possession, enjoying only the earnest of the inheritance. We seldom speak even of any of the great mysteries of the gospel without uttering some words of our own which show that we have understood them yet. I think the Lord likes us to display our ignorance, first that we may know it, and then that he may remove it.

10. *But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.*

The daybreak no sooner comes to the world than you discern everything in its natural hue and its just proportion. You see color where before everything was black, you perceive the beauty of the landscape, the mountain rises before you; the river rolls on mightily towards the sea; even the tiny flowers challenge your notice; you mark all on earth, for by the sun God has painted all the world with the colors of the rainbow.

11. *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I become a man, I put away childish things.*

There are some things which we count very precious now, which will soon be of no value to us whatever. There are some things that we know or think we know, and we pride ourselves a good deal upon our knowledge; but when we shall become men we shall set no more value upon that knowledge than a child does upon his toys when he grows up to be a man. Our spiritual manhood in heaven will discard many things which we now count precious, as a full grown man discards the treasures of his childhood.

12. *For now we see through a glass, darkly;*

Darkly—in a riddle! So weak are our perceptions of mind, that plain truths often puzzle us. The words that teach us are pictures which need explanation. The thoughts that stir us are visions which coat in our brains and want rectifying. Oh,

for clearer vision! Oh, for more perfect knowledge! Mark you,it is a matter of congratulation that we do see; though we have much cause for diffidence, because we do but “see through a glass, darkly.” Thank God we do know; but let it cheek our conceit, We know only in part. Beloved, the objects we look at are distant, and we are near-sighted. The revelation of God is ample and profound, but our understanding is weak and shallow.

but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

We cannot here drink the wine of the kingdom, it is too strong for us; but up there we shall drink it new in our heavenly Father’s kingdom, without fear of the intoxications of pride, or the staggerings of passions.

13. *And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three;*

Three abiding graces. Some have said that faith and hope will not be found in heaven. Why not? Why not? It seems to me there will be plenty of room for them—plenty of space for them. Am I to be an unbeliever when I get to heaven then? Am I not to believe when my disembodied spirit goes to heaven? Am I not to believe in the resurrection of the dead? Am I not hopefully to expect it? Am I not in heaven to believe in the second advent of Christ? Am I not to be hoping for it? Am I not to believe in the complete conquest of Christ, and that he shall reign from the river, even to the ends of the earth? And am I not to hope for it? To miss faith and hope in heaven were to miss two things which the Apostle expressly tells us are the abiding things.

but the greatest of these is charity.

It is the highest, the pinnacle. It is not the foundation—that is faith. Just as a rose in full bloom is greater than the stem that bears it, so, whilst faith is most needful, and hope most cheering, love is the most beautiful and brightest of the three.

1 Corinthians 14

[Spurgeon never preached or commented on this chapter.]

1 Corinthians 15

1, 2. *Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;*

Paul preached the gospel, his hearers received it, and also stood in it: “wherein ye stand.” It is essential to salvation to hear the gospel, to receive it, and then to stand in it.

by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

By which the apostle means, unless they had a false faith, a merely notional faith; or he may also mean “Unless what I have preached unto you should have been a fable, and therefore you will have exercised your faith upon nothing real, and so it would have been in vain.”

What, then, was this gospel which Paul had preached, and which the Christians in Corinth had received—the gospel which Paul declared would save them if they truly believed it? Was it a gospel made up merely of doctrines? No; it was a gospel formed of facts.

3. *For I delivered unto you first of all that which, I also received,*

The preacher of Christ must not make new doctrines. He is not to be his own teacher, he is to receive the truth first, and then to deliver it. The Christian minister takes the lamp out of the hand of God, and then passes it on to the hands of his people. Think not that any originality is needed in the pulpit. All that is required is that the herald should faithfully deliver his Master’s message just as

his Master gives it to him.

how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

This, then, is the gospel, that Jesus “died for our sins”, taking our sins upon himself. He bore the death penalty for us, “according to the Scriptures.” There are plenty of Scriptures, Old Testament Scriptures, which teach this great truth by way of prophecy.

4. *And that he was buried,*

This was necessary as a proof of his death, and as the ground work of his rising again. There are many passages in the Old Testament which describe the Messiah as dying for sinners, especially the old chapter of Isaiah’s prophecy. There are others that speak of him as being buried, yet not corrupting in the tomb. These were facts which the apostle had received upon the testimony of others; now comes the great fact of the resurrection:

and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

This is the very keystone of the gospel arch—the Christ who died on the cross, and was buried in Joseph’s tomb, “rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” This great truth of Christ’s resurrection is so important that Paul dwells upon it at length.

5-7. *And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.*

In different places, and at different hours; sometimes by one, sometimes by eleven, once by five hundred brethren at once, Jesus was seen after he had risen from the dead.

There is no fact, in all history, that is so well attested as the resurrection of Jesus

Christ from the dead. Whether there ever was such a person as Julius Caesar might be contested, though there were, doubtless, thousands of witnesses who saw him, and many who wrote about him; but as to whether Christ rose from the dead, no candid mind can entertain a doubt. He was seen by great companies of believers and by various individuals who had long known him most intimately, and who had many opportunities of judging whether they were deceived or not.

8. *And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.*

Paul calls himself an abortion, and speaks of himself as one hardly worth mentioning; yet he had seen the Lord after his resurrection from the dead. He was not a man to be deceived, for he had persecuted the Church of Christ. He was exceedingly mad against the Messiah; so that if he said that he bad seen Jesus of Nazareth, and that he was converted by the sight, we may be quite sure that it was so. Paul was not a man to undergo all the sacrifices he had to endure, for the sake of a mere dream.

9. *For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

“God has forgiven me,” said a good man once, “but I shall never forgive myself.” So was it with the apostle Paul; he knew that God had forgiven him, and honored him by making him an apostle, but he could not forgive himself; and no doubt the tears gushed from his eyes when he wrote these words, “I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

10. *But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

No man could be more thoroughly with Christ, heart and soul, than that Paul who, aforetime, had been the blood thirsty Saul of Tarsus. His witness may well be believed; and, in connection with all that went before it, it proves beyond all doubt that he who was crucified and was laid in the tomb, did certainly rise again, and was seen in life after death.

11. *Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.*

There was not a doubt about that. All the apostles, all the early Christians preached the resurrection of Christ; and the Corinthians, when they became Christians, believed it.

12. *Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

What! had they got so far as that, to call themselves Christians, and yet they doubted the truth of the resurrection of the dead? Yes, they spirited it away, they made it into a kind of myth or fable; and yet they called themselves Christians. That the heathen should not believe it, was not wonderful; but that those who professed to believe that Christ had risen from the dead, yet doubted the resurrection of his people, was indeed a strange thing. Paul argues with them about this matter.

Christ was the pattern man to all his people. He is their Representative. Whatever he did, he did for them; and whatever was wrought in him shall be surely wrought in them, and if Christ rose from the dead, then all who are members of his mystical body must rise too; for when the Head comes out of the grave, you cannot retain the members in it. Prove that Christ rose, and you prove that his people rise, for they are one with him.

13. *But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen:*

Yet it is proved by hundreds of credible witnesses that Christ is risen, therefore there is a resurrection.

14. *And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.*

This truth is the key-stone of the arch, put this sway, and the whole tumbles down. It is upon this that the whole Christian system rests. If the resurrection of

Christ be a mere myth, and not a positive matter of fact, preaching and faith are equally vain.

15. *Yea and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.*

The apostle puts the matter strongly, yet not too strongly. He seems to say, “You know me to be an honest and truthful man, having no selfish motive in what l declare unto you; but if Christ did not rise from the dead, I have testified to you a gross falsehood, and led you to put your trust in an imposture.” So he stakes his own personal character upon the fact of Christ resurrection.

16, 17. *For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; you are yet in your sins.*

Yet they knew that they were not in their sins, for they had the witness within then that their sins had been pardoned. They knew that sin had no more dominion over them, for they had been made to walk in holiness before the Lord. “Therefore,” says Paul, “Christ must have risen, for if he had not risen you would have remained sinners as you once were.”

So that you cannot be a Christian if you deny the resurrection of Christ. You must give up Christianity altogether, and confess that your faith in it was a delusion, unless you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and that therefore there is a resurrection from the dead for the sons of men. Let it ever be most clearly understood that what Christ is, that his people are.

There is an unbroken union between the Head and the members, so that, if he lives, they live; and if he lives not, then they live not; and if they live not, then he lives not. Jesus and those for whom he died are so intimately joined together that they are really and truly one, and nothing can ever separate them.

18. *Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*

All the godly saints died resting in the risen Christ; and if he is not risen, they

died under a delusion, and they have perished.

19. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

That is to say, if our hope for the future be all a lie, we have been dreadfully deceived; and, moreover, if we could lose a hope so brilliant as that has been to us, there would fall upon us a sense of loss so great that no one in the world could be so wretched as we should be. Besides, the apostles being always in jeopardy of their lives, if they were suffering poverty, and persecution, and the fear of death by martyrdom, all for a lie, they were indeed of all men the most deluded, and the most miserable. But the Corinthians would not admit that, neither will we.

20. *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.*

Paul has been arguing on every supposition, and now he comes back with his own positive witness a Christ is risen. You remember that Jesus died at the time of the Passover, as the one great Paschal Lamb; but he rose again on the first day of the week, and that was the feast of first-fruits with the Jews. They brought handfuls of wheat from the fields to show their gratitude to God, and in order that a blessing might rest on all the crop; and Paul uses Christ's rising on that particular day as a figure:

"Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." He lives. He is the first-fruits, and the full harvest will follow. All who are in him will rise from the dead; for he is one with them, and none can separate them from him, nor sever him from them. They died in him, and they live because he liveth, blessed be his name!

21, 22. *For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, Given in Christ shall all be made alive.*

Not that all shall be saved, but all will be raised from the dead. Or else the

passage means that, as all who were in the first Adam died as the result of Adam's sin, so all who are in the second Adam, that is, Christ, Shall live as the result of his righteousness. The question is, Are we in the second Adam? Faith is that which unites us to Christ. If we are trusting in him by a living faith, then his rising from the dead ensures our rising from the dead; and if not, it be true that we shall rise, but it will be to shame and everlasting contempt.

23, 24. *But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.*

Whatever it may mean, it seems to teach us the mediatorial crown and government are temporary, and intended only to last until all rule, and all authority and power, are put down by Jesus, and the rule of God shall be universally acknowledged. Jesus cannot renounce his Godhead, but his mediatorial sovereignty will be yielded up to him from whom it came, and that last solemn act, in which he shall hand back to his Father the all-subduing scepter, will be a praising of God to a most wonderful extent beyond human conception. We wait and watch for it, and we shall behold it in the time appointed.

25, 26. *For he must return till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.*

Here the great proof flashes out—if death is to be destroyed, then there must be a resurrection, for death cannot be destroyed until the very bones of the saints are delivered from the strongholds of the enemy.

27, 28. *For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.*

This is a very difficult passage, but I suppose the meaning is just this. Jesus Christ, in order to remedy the great mischief of sin, was appointed to a mediatorial kingdom over all worlds, and that kingdom will continue until all his enemies shall be destroyed, and sin shall be trodden under his feet. Then Christ —as mediator, mark you, not as Lord—shall deliver up his mediatorial kingdom to his Father, and there shall be heard that great shout, “Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! The Lord God omnipotent reigneth!” Christ as God, as one of the persons of the ever-blessed Trinity, will still be as glorious as ever, but his mediatorial reign will then be over, seeing that he hath accomplished all its purposes.

29. *Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?*

This is another most difficult passage, and many meanings have been given to it, but I think the most likely to be correct is this: As soon as a member of the early Christian Church was given up to the lion or to be burned, another convert would step forward, and say, Let me take his name and place.” Though it was almost certain that they also would soon be put to death, there were always found persons bold enough to come forward to be baptized, to take the place of the dead. “Now,” says the apostle, “what advantage is there in this horizon if the dead rise not?”

30. *And why stand we in jeopardy every hour?*

Why were the apostles always subjecting themselves to cruel persecution?

31. *I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I did daily.*

He was so hunted about everywhere that there was not a day in whole he felt secure of his life, so he asks, “Why should I endure this if there be no world to come?”

32. *If after the manner of men I has fought with beasts at Ephesus,*

what advantageth it me, if asked dead rise not?

It is quite possible that Paul was thrown to the lions in the theatre at Ephesus, and that he fought with them, and came off a conqueror. “But why,” says he, “did I try to save my life for future labor and for future suffering if the dead rise not?”

let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die.

If there is no resurrection, the philosophy of the Epicureans is a true one. If we are to come an end when we die, let us enjoy life while we can, if it is to be a short life, let it be a merry one. You see to what a conclusion this theory would lead us, so let us start back from it with horror. The logical consequence convicts the statement of falsehood. There is a future state, and there is to be a resurrection of the body.

33–35. *Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manner.Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame. But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?*

You know the almost endless questions that may be asked about this matter, and you know the snares into which a man may fall if he begins curiously to pry into this mystery. Paul will have no prying into the mystery, and somewhat tartly he answers—

36. *Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.*

Would you take the seed into your hand, and begin to argue, “How can that little seed ever become a flower?” Could you guess, apart from observation, what kind of flower would out of such a seed as that? You would make a hundred foolish guesses if you tried it. So is it concerning the resurrection of the body; in due time we shall know, and we shall see; but, till then, we must wait and trust.

37, 38. *And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that*

shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

Every man shall have his own body. There will be differences and peculiarities, even as there are here; and we shall therefore know each other.

39–41. *All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory.*

We shall he among the shining ones, and shall ourselves shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father. If the wrinkled face of the patriarch Moses, bronzed and browned by forty years in the Arabian desert, and lined by the long fast on the top of the mountain—if the dry parchment of his face could shine so marvellously, why should not our bodies be endowed with glory, when God shall raise them again from the grave? As a crocus bulb looks up from the soil wherein it was buried, and boldly lifts up a golden cup, which the sun fills with glory from the heavens, why should not we also bloom into perfection?

42. *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:*

It will be a body upon which the tooth of time can have no power, and into which the dart of death can never be thrust. Age shall roll after age, but that body shall exist in everlasting youth. It shall sing, but never shall its song be stayed by weakness; it shall fly, but never shall its flight flag with weariness. There shall be no signs of mortality; the shroud, the mattock, and the spade are never seen in heaven. Such a thing as an open grave shall never appear in the celestial kingdom, there they live, live, live, but never, never, never shall they die. See then, how different the body must be; for as this body is constituted, every nerve and every blood vessel tells me I must die. It cannot be otherwise. I must endure

this stern decree, “Dust to dust, earth to earth, ashes to ashes,” but in heaven every nerve of the new body shall cry, “Immortality.” Every part of that new frame shall speak for itself, and tell to the immortal spirit that they are everlasting companions, managed in eternal wedlock.

43, 44. *It is sown in dishonor;*

For, with all the honor that we can pay to our departed dear ones, it is a dishonor to them to have to lie encased in a coffin, in the cold clay of the cemetery.

It is raised in glory:

Oh, the splendor of that resurrection!

It is sown in weakness;

It is so weak that it cannot get into its own last resting-place, but must be tenderly laid there by others.

43, 44. *It is raised in power: it is sown a natural body;*

A soulish body, a body fitted for the human soul.

It is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

A body fitted for the new-born spirit which is given in regeneration.

45. *And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*

When we, by being born again, receive his likeness: then we participate in that quickening, and rise into the nature and image of God. There is a “living and incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever,” and which becomes our

life in that day when, by the power of the Spirit of the eternal God, we are "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." This is a deep mystery, and blessed are they who need not merely talk of it, because every, day they know its power.

46, 47. *Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.*

Whatever Christ's body is in heaven, our body is to be like it; whatever its glory and strength and power, our vile body is to be fashioned like unto his glorious body. As for our soul, whatever of absolute perfection—whatever of immortal joy Christ possesses we are to possess that; and as for honor—whatever of esteem and love Christ may have from intelligent beings, we are to share in the same; and as for position before God—whatever Christ has—we are to stand where he stands.

48. *As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy:*

You and I have every evidence about us that we are earthy.

And as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.

Glory be to the name of Christ we belong to him, and already the heavenly light begins to thine upon us, and we are getting ready soon to put on the garments of immortality.

49. *And all we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*

Our body shall be fashioned like unto the body of Jesus Christ himself. We are looking forward to a time when we shall have done with aches and pains, with weariness and decay, with old age and its infirmities, and with all liability to death. We expect perpetual youth to be our portion, and that joy shall thrill through every nerve and sinew of our frame, which now, alas, so often becomes

the theater of agony. Yes, this is our hope, perfection of spirit, soul, and body; for Christ has redeemed the whole, and he will have the whole to be his inheritance, and in the whole of our manhood his glorious image shall be reflected for ever.

50. *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.*

So I may have the same body, the same for identity, and yet as to its constituent elements, and especially as to its qualities of weakness, mortality and corruption, it may he as distinct and changed as light is distinct and changed from darkness.

51. *Behold I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,*

We shall not all die, some will be alive when Christ comes to this earth again; "but we shall all be changed," if not by the process of death and resurrection, yet by some other means.

52. *In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall he raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.*

Somehow or other, such a change as this must take place before we can enter heaven, for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

53, 54. *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

As though it were dropped like one black, cruel drop into the cup, and then victory was poured in as generous wine, and you drank the bitter drop right up before you knew it. Saints shall not know that they die, but only that they have

gained the victory!

55-57. *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Yet with all that majestic language, with all that bold flight of eloquence, he does not deny that death is a gloomy thing. Even his very figures imply it. He does not laugh at it, he does not say, “Oh, it is nothing to die;” he describes death as a monster, he speaks of it as having a sting, he tells us wherein the strength of that sting lies and even in the exclamation of triumph he imputes that victory not to unaided flesh, but he says, “Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Therefore, my beloved brethren, “Let us weep and lament”? Oh, no! That is not the apostle’s inference. Therefore, let us throw down our weapons, and say, “It is no good to continue the fight, for we must all die”? Far from it.

58. *Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*

“Ye know,” because Christ has risen, and because you also shall rise and because there is a reward of grace laid up in store for you. The Lord’s people may die, but the Lord’s church never dies, and the Lord himself, the ever-living One, it always with us, blessed be his holy name!

1 Corinthians 16

Spurgeon never preached or commented on this chapter.

2 CORINTHIANS

2 Corinthians 1

1. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:*

Paul is very jealous of his apostleship. There were some in Corinth who denied it, and therefore he takes care, at the very commencement of this Epistle—as he does in beginning most of his letters—to write concerning himself, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.” But with what humility of mind does he associate Timothy with himself! Frequently he puts Timothy, his own convert, one so young, and so much beneath him in position and attainments, on a level with himself; and if we also can help our younger brethren, how willingly should we put our-selves side, by side with them!

2. *Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Christianity is a religion of benedictions. Whereas worldly people often use the language of courtesy towards one another without meaning what they say, the saints of God put a fullness of meaning into their expressions, and really wish every good thing to those to whom they write. “Grace be to you.” That comes first, and then peace follows. Peace without grace is a very dangerous possession; but a peace that grows out of the possession of grace is a gracious peace, and will lead to the peace of glory ere long. This grace and peace are to come “from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” There is no grace for us apart from the Lord Jesus Christ; and though the Father is full of love, and will give grace and peace to his people, yet the Lord Jesus Christ must always be the channel through which these incomparable favors must flow to them.

3. *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;*

Let me read those titles again: “The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.” Do not the second and third titles derive much of their significance from the first one? It is because God is “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” that he becomes “the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.”

4. *Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*

Experience teaches the first rank of God’s servants, and their experience of sorrow and consolation is often the means of enabling them to be the means of blessing to others. Almost everything that the minister of the gospel enjoys or endures will be found to be sent to him for the elect’s sake, that he may know how to teach them the lessons he has himself learned.

5. *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.*

The apostles were the most tried, but they were the most comforted. They had to stand the brunt of the battle, bat the Lord was their strength in a very special sense. Observe the balance in this verse: “as the sufferings,” so our consolation;” and “as the sufferings of Christ about in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” With little trial, we may expect little comfort. It is better to leave the whole matter entirely with God, or else we might almost desire to be digged about by the spade of affliction, that we might receive more of the living waters of consolation.

6. *And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.*

We receive both suffering and consolation for the sake of others, and we are bound to give out again all that we receive. It is the essence of the true Christian life first to be dependent upon God for everything, and then to give forth to all around us that which God has poured into our spirit. The heart would soon die if it pumped in the blood, and never pumped it out again; but it is by that perpetual process of giving out what it has received that it continues in life; and the highest form of Christian life is the reception of all that comes to us out of the fullness of Christ, and then the free giving out of what he has bestowed.

7. *And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.*

How these things are put together! God does not call his people to the one without the other—no consolation without affliction; and, blessed be his name, no affliction without consolation!

8. *For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:*

Why would Paul have them know this but that they relight understand that he had to suffer as they did, and even more. Sometimes, God's people are apt to think that their ministers are not cast down as they themselves are.

They look upon them as a sort of superior order of beings who have no doubts and fears, no want of strength, no despair; but that is an idle fiction, and the sooner it is gone from our minds, the better; for those who lead the people of God will rather have more afflictions than less. Seeing that they need more instruction than others need, and that instruction usually comes with the rod, in all probability they will have more of the rod than others will. Paul, therefore, is anxious that the Corinthians should know in what seas of trouble he had to swim.

9, 10. *But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we: should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust*

that he will yet deliver us;

It is supposed by some that the apostle was in danger of being put to death in same extraordinary way—perhaps by wild beasts in the amphitheatre. We know that he speaks of having fought with beasts at Ephesus; we cannot tell whether there is here any allusion to that trial, or what it was; but it was evidently some death which, to the apostle, seemed to be exceedingly terrible; and when he was delivered from it, it was to hire like a resurrection. He speaks of it as having been wrought by God that raiseth the dead; and he puts down this deliverance, together with some other of which he was at that very time the subject—"and doth deliver,"—and upon these experiences he builds his expectation that God "will yet deliver."

11. *Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.*

When many pray, after the blessings is received, many will give thanks. Paul rejoices to have been the object of interest to a large number of Christians everywhere in the time of his great peril; and when he escaped, he believed be would still be the object of their interest, and that there would be more prayer in the world, and more praise, too, because of the dangers from which God had delivered him. It is worth while for any of us to be in sore sickness, or in great straits, if thereby the quantity of prayer and praise in the world shall be increased to God's glory.

12. *For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshy wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and mere abundantly to you-ward.*

There had been whispers, among these Corinthians, that Paul had concealed a double meaning in some of his writings, and also that he had made a promise which he never intended to keep; so now he calls upon them to bear witness that he never was a man to act according to policy, but he was a straightforward, honest, plain-dealing man, full of godly sincerity and unselfishness. He had

abundantly proved all this to the Corinthians, for, lest they should have any occasion for speaking against him, he would not take at their hands the support to which he was entitled, but he labored at his trade of tent-making that they might not have anything to say concerning him except that he was disinterested in all his endeavors to serve them. Paul evidently felt their unkindness very much, but his conscience assured him that their accusations were unjust.

13 *For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end;*

See how Paul restrains himself in writing to these people, he had good cause to be offended, for they had touched him in a point about which he was very jealous, namely, his integrity; but here he speaks with great moderation of spirit, and herein lay his strength. Every Christian man, when he has to defend himself against false accusations, should use soft words and hard arguments.

14. *As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

What a happy condition of things it is when the teacher and the tight mutually rejoice in each other; when the teacher is the joy of the flock, and when he can rejoice in his people! This is profitable to all; but when there are discards, and fault-findings, and the like, this is neither glorifying to God nor profitable to the people.

15, 16. *And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; and to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea.*

He had planned to see them in his going, and also in his returning; but he could not carry out the idea which was in his mind. The wisest of men often find their plans impracticable, and even an inspired man is not always inspired. God guides him when guidance is absolutely necessary; but, at other times, he leaves him to arrange according to his own judgment:, and to find out that his judgment

is not infallible. “I had a mind,” says he, “to come and see you twice.”

17. *When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness?*

“Did I make up my mind hastily, and then did I change it all of a sudden without good reason? Had I never thought before I decided, and therefore did I find it necessary to revoke my promise?”

or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay?

There were some in the church at Corinth who said, “He promised to come and see us, but he did not keep his word.” They declared that hie promise could not be depended upon, and that he very easily changed his mind.

Now, the apostle had done nothing of the kind; he had solid reasons for his change of purpose, and reasons full of love to them; but they misrepresented him. Do not, my dear friends, count the fiery trial of misrepresentation to be any strange thing. Even some of those whom you have loved, and for who’ you have been willing to lay down your lives, will turn against you; it is no new thing that they should do so. They may catch up anything which you have done in the simplicity of your heart, and turn it against you. Whenever they do so, I say again, do not think that any strange thing has happened unto you; it happened to Paul, then why should not you have a similar experience?

18. *But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay.*

He binds up his own ministry with himself, and he says, “You charge me with being fickle, but you know better; you are well aware that I am not one who says one thing today and another thing tomorrow. You know that I have been open and aboveboard in all my dealings with you, and that I have never stooped to policy and craftiness, but have spoken that which I believed, whatever might come of it.”

19. *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay,*

but in him was yea.

He declares that he preached the truth straightforwardly and consistently, and that he did not say one thing one day and another thing a few days later.

Christ is no quicksand, slipping and sliding away, and so ruining those who cling to him. He is the Rock of ages, and he stands fast for ever. His gospel is one and the same at all times. You see that, as Paul grows warm, he advances in his argument. If the Corinthians suspected his honesty in making a promise, the next thing they would do would be to suspect the gospel, and after that they would suspect Christ himself, who is the truth.

20. *For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*

Paul loved to turn from some lower subject to his Lord. When he wrote the words, "ye and nay," they suggested to him the perfect constancy of the love of Christ, and thankfulness for his faithful promises; so, as the thought came into his mind, he could do no other than put it into the Epistle he was writing, for he never missed an opportunity of praising the Lord Jesus Christ. I wish we could all imitate him, in this respect, far more than we have ever done; for our Savior is worthy of all the praise we can ever give him, and more, too.

21–23. *Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.*

"If had come, I should have been obliged to rebuke you and reprove you. I should have had to be like an armed man going to battle, or an officer of the law carrying out the sentence pronounced upon a criminal, and I could not bear to do that; so I felt it would be better and wiser to stay away, and therefore I did not visit you as I had proposed."

24. *Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of*

your joy: for by faith ye stand.

It will always be our wisdom, dear friends, to put ourselves as much as we can into the position of those whom we address. It is a pity for anyone ever to seem to preach down to people; it is always better to be as nearly as possible on the same level as they are.

2 Corinthians 2

1. *But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness.*

And they ought to have had enough confidence in him to know that he had a very good and sufficient reason for not fulfilling his conditional promise.

Let us, dear friends, who, are one in Christ, trust each other; for, if suspicion be, once bred among the people of God, it will mean farewell to all fellowship.

2-11. *For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me? And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you. But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his*

devices.

If that backslider has been awakened to a sense of his true condition, he will feel very unhappy; so be you very sympathetic towards him. He may be afraid to come back into membership with the church; if so, go after him, and encourage him to return. If he says, “I have brought disgrace upon the name of Christ,” try to bear part of the shame that he feels. If he says, “I cannot face So-and-so,” say to him, “I will stand between you; or I will go and plead for you.” Take to yourself, as far as you can, the shame and the disgrace which belong to the backslider. Try to get right into his place. I am sure that there is no other way of setting broken bones that is equal to this. There is no way of bringing back the wandering sheep like that which the good Shepherd took when he lifted the poor creature right up on his own shoulders. It was too worn, and weak, and weary, for him to lead it back, or drive it back, so he carried it all the way; and, brethren, let us carry the backsliders on our own shoulders in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. As far as it is possible to us, let us compel them to come in once more that God’s house may be filled, and let us take the burden of their grief, and of their shame, upon ourselves.

12, 13. *Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.*

The apostle was like Abraham of old; he went forth, not knowing whither he went. There was a certain path which he must take, and when he strove to turn either to the right hand or to the left, the Spirit directly forbade him, and he was compelled to go on till he came to the sea-port of Troas. There, wearied with his journey, he cast himself upon his couch, and in the midst of the night a vision appeared unto him. A man who by his brogue and his dress was discovered to be a Macedonian, said to him, “Come over and help us.”

14. *Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ,.*

Picture Paul, the aged, the man who had been beaten five times with “forty

stripes save one," who had been dragged forth for dead, the man of great sufferings, who had passed through whole seas of persecution-only think of him saying, at the close of his ministerial career, "Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ!" to triumph when shipwrecked, to triumph when scourged, to triumph in the stocks, to triumph under the stones, to triumph amidst the hiss of the world, to triumph when he was driven from the city and shook of I the dust from his feet, to triumph at all times in Christ Jesus!

and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place

Ah! with this thought a minister may lay his head upon his pillow: "God makes manifest the savor of his knowledge." With this he may shut his eyes when his career is over, and with this he may open them in heaven: "God hath made known by me the savor of his knowledge in every place."

15, 16. *For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death;*

It is a fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ will increase some men's damnation at the last great day. Again, I startle at myself when I have said it; for it seems too horrible a thought for us to venture to utter—that the gospel of Christ will make hell hotter to some men than it otherwise would have been. Men would all have sunk to hell had it not been for the gospel. The grace of God reclaims "a multitude that no man can number;" it secures a countless army who shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation;" but, at the same time, it does to those who reject it, make their damnation even more dreadful.

and to the other the savour of life unto life.

It is "a savor of life unto life." And not only "life unto life" in this world, but; of life unto life" eternal. Every one who has this life shall receive the next life; for "the Lord will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

And who is sufficient for these things?

To order and distribute its sacred offices aright, to govern with discretion, to exercise discipline with prudence, to hide a strong hand, and to show at all times a loving heart—such thoughts roll in wave after wave till they threaten to overwhelm the mind. And then at last to render unto the Master an account, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed; to be saluted of my God at his coming as a faithful and wise servant who has given to his household meat in due season; to be approved as a faithful steward of the mysteries of God, not having "shunned to declare the whole counsel of God," as well to those that did forbear as to those that did hear—if such aims do sometimes wind up one's nerves to extraordinary energy, they verily make the heart palpitate at other times with the fear that haunts, and the solemnity that awes, our soul.

17. *For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.*

We have heard of preachers who, under the rose, believe very differently from what they openly say. The trust-deed requires some little consonance with evangelical doctrine, but they loathe it in their souls, and tell their brethren so in private. But as for us, "we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully." We dare preach everything that we believe, and preach it as plainly as possible. The more you know us through and through, the more glad we shall be. Our gospel is one which may be advertised on every hoarding: we have nothing to conceal.

2 Corinthians 3

1-3. *Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.*

I remember that Mr. Matthew Wilkes once preached from this text. He compared the preacher to a pen, and said that some pens needed mending now and then, and that all pens, however good they were, must be dipped in the ink if they were to do any writing at all; and he added, “You ought to pray all the more for your preacher when he does not write well, ‘Lord, dip him in the ink; give him more of the unction of the Holy Spirit, and then his word will have power over the hearts of men!’”

4, 5. *And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves;*

Who can turn hearts of stone into flesh? Who can write without ink? Who can write on the heart? Who can so write that what is written shall be eternal? “Who is sufficient for these things?” The more we study the work of grace wrought by God through his ministers, the more are we forced to ask, “Who is sufficient for these things?” To raise the dead, to turn a stone to flesh; who is sufficient for these? To give eyes to the blind, and ears to the deaf; to subdue the proud will, and enlighten the darkened heart; to deliver men from the fascinations of sin and Satan, to bring them out of darkness into God’s marvellous light, to turn rebels into sons of God; who is sufficient for these things? Yet nothing less than this will bring salvation. Here we have a chain of miracles, an Alpine range of

wonders piled upon each other, yet no one marvel can be dispensed with; and we are to be the ministers by whom such miracles are wrought: “Who is sufficient for these things?”

but our sufficiency is of God;

In God there is all the wisdom, all the thought, all the love, all the power, all the conquering energy which a minister can require; and to work upon the hearts of men there lies in the omnipotent grace of God a fullness of might, so that the stony heart shall be transformed, and on its fleshy tablet shall be written the will of the Lord.

That our sufficiency should be of God is infinitely better than if it were of ourselves; for then our sufficiency cannot be questioned, cannot be suspended, cannot be exhausted. If you had to bear your own charges, you might soon be bankrupt; but now you are like a child that travels with his father, and his father pays for everything. He has no care about cost, he is not called upon to exercise a pinching economy; he draws upon an inexhaustible purse for all he needs, and leads a princely life; for his father pays for all. Our sufficiency is of God; let us practically enjoy this truth.

6. *Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*

We are not ministers of the old covenant of command and threatening; for, if we were so, we might exceedingly fear and quake; but we are sent to be ministers of the spirit of that covenant which saith, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” We are ministers of a covenant of pure grace, in which God, and not man, is the worker. We are, by the truth, spoken in love, to convey to men’s hearts the Holy Ghost. We are ministers, not of the letter of the law, which killeth; but of the spirit, that giveth life. “Oh!” saith one, “that is hard work.” It seems to me, on the contrary, to be the easiest of work when divine power works in us.

7, 8. *But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones,*

was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

the face of Moses shone typically, to show as that there is a great glory about the law of God. It has a glory all its own from its spirituality, its holiness, its perfectness, its justice, its immutability, its power over the conscience, and so forth. It has eminent glory, because it has been ordained of God himself, and therefore stands as the sacred rule of the universe. But this is not what Paul understands by the glory of the law. He makes the glory "of that which was to be abolished," the glory of the ceremonial law, to lie in its end. Now, the end of the law for righteousness is Christ. The law is given to point us to Christ, to drive us to Christ, to be our schoolmaster to whip us to Christ, to convince us of our need of Christ, and to shut us out from every other hope but that which begins and ends with Christ. The glory of the law is Christ. And so Moses comes with a glory on his face which the children of Israel could not perceive, nor steadfastly look into.

9-11. *For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.*

O let his face shine in your esteem, ye saints of the Lord, for the ministration of life must be more glorious, far! Christ comes to us to tell us all that God will tell. The revelation of God is Christ. If you would know God, he that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father. God's word is Jesus, he speaketh fully by him.

12, 13. *Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:*

When Moses face shone the people could not look thereon; but when Jesus came from his transfiguration the people ran to him and saluted him. Everything is attractive in God in Christ Jesus. In him we see God to the full, but the Deity so mildly beams through the medium of human flesh that mortal man may draw near, and look, and live. This glory in the face of Jesus Christ is assuredly the glory of God, even though veiled; for thus in every other instance doth God in measure shine forth.

14, 15. *But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away.*

Why did Moses veil his face? The answer is this: it was a judicial symbol, setting forth the sentence of God upon the people. The Lord, by this token, as good as said, "You are so rebellious, so given to your idolatries, so unwilling to see, that henceforth you shall not see the brightness of my glory in the dispensation of the law in which you live. Moses shall veil his face because the vail is upon your hearts." It is a dreadful thing when God gives men up to a judicial blindness, when he permits the vail which they have woven to abide over their minds, "that seeing they might not see; and hearing they might not understand." The vail was literally on Moses' face, but spiritually it was on their hearts. Henceforth they were not to see because they had not wished to see. He that wilfully shuts his eyes will find that God takes away his sight. If thou refuse to understand, justice will make thee foolish. The shadow of destruction is insensibility. The eyes are blindfolded before the fatal volley is fired.

Even as today men see outward rites that God has given, but see not their glorious meaning, so was it with Israel in the wilderness: they saw sacrifices, but they knew not the Great Sacrifice; they saw the oil and the water, but they knew not the Holy Ghost; they saw ten thousand tokens dear and manifest of the ever-blessed Messiah, but they did not perceive him so as to know him when he came. Every type and ceremony might say, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" The law is overlaid with the glory of Christ, as the face of Moses was covered with light. This is the deepest and innermost meaning of the sacred light which glowed upon the skin of the face of

Moses.

17. *Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

He is the free man, whom the truth makes free. He who has grace in his heart is free, he cares for no one; he has the right upon his side; he has God within him—the in dwelling Spirit of the Holy Ghost; he is a prince of the blood royal of heaven; he is a noble, having the true patent of nobility; he is one of God's elect, distinguished, chosen children, and he is not the man to bend, or meanly cringe.

There was a time when we had not that Spiritual liberty—when we were slaves. But a little while ago all of us who now are free in Christ Jesus, were slaves of the devil: we were led captives at his will. We talked of free-will, but free-will is a slave. We boasted that we could do what we pleased; but oh! what a slavish and dreamy liberty we had. It was a fancied freedom. We were slaves to our lusts and passions -slaves to sin; but now we are freed from sin; we are delivered from our tyrant; a stronger than he has cast out the strong man armed, and we are free.

18. *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

As I stand here I look into the mirror of the Word and see myself. But this is not enough for me: I will look till I see more. I continue looking into the mystic glass until, to my great surprise, I see another form appearing. Evidently some mysterious Personage is reflected in this mirror. How beautiful and majestic is the Stranger's visage! I look till the image of my countenance melts into the reflection of his countenance, and he alone is seen. I only appear in him. Is he not lovely?

Surely this is the mirror that Mercy, in "The Pilgrim's Progress," longed for. Does not Master Bunyan say of it, "Now the glass was one of a thousand. It would present a man one way, with his own features exactly; and turning it another way it would show one the very face and similitude of the Prince of Pilgrims himself. Yea, I have talked with them that can tell, and they have said that they have seen the very crown of thorns upon his head, by looking in that

glass. They have therein also seen the holes in his hands, in his feet, and his side”? A man looks into the law of liberty, and he sees all perfection in Christ: he looks and looks till, by a strange miracle of grace, his own image dissolves into the image of Jesus. Surely this is a thing worth looking into, and infinitely superior to any looking into a glass merely to see yourselves. We are compelled to say, “Come, see a Word which tells me all things that ever I did: did not this come from God? “Nay, more; we said this at first, but now we see Jesus, and we cry, “Come, see a Man that told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?”

2 Corinthians 4

1. *Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;*

It is a very high privilege to be called to the work of the Christian ministry, and when the minister remembers what great mercy he has himself received, what sins have been forgiven, what favors have been bestowed, he has the very best incentives in all the world to pursue his ministry with diligence and with zeal.

“We faint not,” says the apostle. We do not hang our harps upon the willows. We do not pray to be allowed to retire from the battle, and give up the strife; but, feeling how great has been the mercy of God to our own souls, we are stirred up to press forward with holy zeal to win the victory. We long that others may taste of the same good things on which we have feasted.

2. *But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.*

Far be it from the teacher of truth ever to use words in a non-natural sense, or to dissemble or equivocate, saying to the ear what he means not in the sense in which the hearer understands it. Far be it from us to mix with the Word of God anything of our own as vintners mix various kinds of wine, for such is the import of the word that the apostle here uses. Let none of us ever handle the Word of God deceitfully. There is no deceit in it; it is all pure unmixed truth. An honest mind is needed for the understanding of it, and then a truthful tongue for the telling of it to others. If we do preach undiluted, unadulterated truth, we must not expect that the natural heart of man will commend our honesty. We are to

commend ourselves to every man's conscience, not by cutting and trimming the Word so as to make it palatable to our hearers, leaving one truth out to please this man, and dwelling too long upon another truth so as to please some other hearer, but by bringing out the whole teaching of the Scripture in clear truthfulness that shall command the approval of the conscience oven of those who may not accept the truth that we proclaim.

3. *But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost;*

It is not hidden under the flowers of our oratory, not hidden under the darkness of our speech, not hidden through the fog of our philosophies; if it be hidden at all, it is hidden "to them that are lost." If they had any spiritual perception or apprehension at all, if they were not utterly lost to everything: that is spiritual, they would be able to receive the gospel that we are bidden to preach, and which therefore becomes "our gospel."

4. *In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

Without light from above, no man can perceive the beauties either of the gospel or of Christ himself. Until God the Holy Spirit sheds a spiritual light upon the person, and offices, and work of Christ, men grope in the dark as blind men do. They see not the truth, they are not persuaded of its excellence; our ministry is to them a veiled ministry, they do not comprehend it. Let those who receive not the gospel see what a miserable state theirs is, they are blinded by "the god of this world." He has such supremacy over their intellects that he has utterly perverted and ruined them.

For we preach not ourselves

What a miserable topic we should have if we did preach ourselves! But we do not set up ourselves as "priests" having authority to administer "sacraments" to a lower order of beings who do not possess sacerdotal sanctity; we do not claim to belong to a ministerial caste; we regard ourselves as simply on an equality with the rest of the Christian brotherhood; and, therefore, "we preach not

ourselves,"—

but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

"Christ Jesus the Lord" is to be the great theme of our preaching; and when it is so, we naturally take our right position with regard to our hearers, as Paul and Timothy did: "and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

6. *For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

There is the very glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, for he is "very God of very God," and he who will but think of the wondrous mystery of the Incarnate Deity, and the simple but marvellous plan of salvation through Christ's atoning sacrifice, will see infinitely more glory there than in all God's works in creation or providence.

7. *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

The original might very fairly be rendered, "We have this treasure in oyster shells," for, just as pearls are found in the shells of oysters, so God gives to those who preach the Word the treasure of the gospel, yet they are themselves nothing but the oyster shells, nothing but the earthen vessel in which God pleases to place his priceless treasures. If you have done anything in the service of God, my brother, remember that you are nothing but the oyster shell, it is God's truth that is the pearl in you; so while you are thankful for the honor that he puts upon you, mind that you give him all the glory. It is well to take the right view of our own imperfections and infirmities, as Paul did when he wrote, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." The infirmity of the creature leaves the more room for the display of the greatness of the Creator; for, if God can work such wondrous results by using such poor tools as we are, how great must be his power and skill!

8, 9. *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*

The apostle is here speaking for himself and all the members of the apostolic college, and also for all the early saints. They appear to have been very much troubled, and sometimes to have been very much perplexed. I meet with certain brethren, now and then, who have no troubles; they are so supremely wise that they are never perplexed, and so eminently holy that they do not appear to belong to the ordinary democracy of Christianity, but are altogether supernatural beings. Well, I do not belong to their clique, and it does not seem to me that Paul and the apostles and the early Christians did. Those great pioneers of the Church of Christ were men who were troubled on every side, perplexed, persecuted, cast down; in fact, they were men of like passions with ourselves.

10. *Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*

The apostles were always ready to die for Christ, and therefore they were enabled to live so much like Christ, imitating his life, and being prepared to follow him even to the death whenever he called them to do so.

11. *For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake) that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.*

The apostles were always to the front where the shots were flying the fastest, and with the deadliest aim; there they stood, the officers of the army of Christ and Paul rejoiced that, for one, he was able thus to make himself to be nothing that Christ might be the great All-in-all.

12. *So then death worketh in us but life in you.*

The disinterestedness of Christian affection is here seen, in that Paul was willing even to be delivered unto death if only the church in Corinth and other Christians might receive more of the divine life. This is the motive that actuated our blessed

Lord himself. He saved others; but, in order to do so, himself he could not save; and he who would be a blessing to others must expect that just in proportion to the good that he is able to impart to them must be the cost to himself.

13, 14. *We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.*

There is no possibility of serving God well, especially under great trials and persecutions, without a deeply-rooted confidence in the truth of his gospel. Once have a doubt concerning that, and the strong sinews of our spiritual manhood are out. Once begin to question the evidences of our holy religion, and you cannot henceforth serve God as you did before. Oh, to be strengthened every day with might in the inner man;—to feel that in our own experience, we have continually fresh proofs of the truth of the gospel, and that, whether we have trials or delights, we are thereby the more firmly rooted in faith, even as the trees are rooted both by the March winds and the April showers;—and so rooted in faith that we grow into it, and cannot be separated from it, because it has become a part of ourselves. Religion is nothing to any of you unless it is woven into the very warp and woof of your being; it must go right into your very soul, and become a vital part of you, or else you have never received it in truth.

15, 16. *For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*

The sickness that crumbles away the body of a Christian often confirms his soul in the faith that he received when he was strong and well. Some of the healthiest hours that God’s people ever have are the hours of their sorest sicknesses. God often sends his people fevers to make them well; he sends them losses to make them rich, he takes away their earthly friends to bring them closer to their best Friend, and he brings them to their wits’ end that they may begin to be truly wise. Often, when God strips us of all our worldly possessions, it is the most soul-enriching season we have ever known; but, on the other hand, the day of

temporal prosperity has often been a day of spiritual poverty. Adversity has many a time been an angel in disguise, but prosperity has been the devil in a mask. Let us take care that we cleave closely to Christ under both experiences, for then both of them shall be sanctified to us.

17. *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;*

This is one of the most remarkable verses in all Scripture; the contrast here drawn is perfect, and the language is in the highest degree pertinent to the subject. When the apostle speaks of affliction, he contrasts with it glory. The affliction he calls a lightness of affliction, but the glory he calls a weight of glory; and while he describes the affliction as momentary, he rightly says that the glory is eternal; and then, as though he would make the contract still more vivid, he says that this momentary, light affliction "worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." He can scarcely find words big enough to express the contrast between what believers now have to endure and what they shall for ever enjoy.

18. *While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal;*

Temporal and temporary; see how they melt away one after another!

but the things which are not seen are eternal.

The substance is beyond the river, the shadows are here. God help us to look for the substance, and to claim it as our own, and let none of us try to grasp the shadows which would be worthless if we could ever hold them in our hands!

2 Corinthians 5

1. *For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

Is not this grand courage on the part of the apostle? With all the world against him, and himself "alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake," he looks at the new body, the new house that God is making for him, and he reckons that, to shuffle off this mortal coil will be no loss to him, since, when he loses the tent in which he lives here, he will go to "a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

2–4. *For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*

This earnest desire, of which the apostle has been speaking in the preceding verses, is made up of two things—a painful groaning and sense of being burdened while we are in this present life, and a supreme longing after our promised portion in the world to come. Dissatisfaction with the very idea of finding a continuing city here, amounting even to groaning, is the condition of the Christians mind. "We look not at the things which are seen," they are not worth a glance; they are temporal, and therefore quite unfit to be the joy of an immortal spirit. The Christian is the most contented man in the world, but he is the least contented with the world.

Whatever the separation of the soul from the body may involve of pain or

mystery, the believer feels that he could dare it all, to enter at once into the unfading joys of the glory-land. Sometimes the heir of heaven grows impatient of his bondage, and like a captive who, looking out of the narrow window of his prison, beholds the green fields of the unfettered earth, and marks the flashing waves of the ocean, ever free, and bears the songs of the uncaged tenants of the air, weeps as he views his narrow cell, and hears the clanking of his chains. There are times when the most patient of the Lord's banished ones feel the home sickness strong upon them. Like those beasts which we have sometimes seen in our menageries, which pace to and fro in their dens, and chafe themselves against the bars-unresting, unhappy, bursting out every now and then into fierce roarings, as though they yearned for the forest or the jungle; even so we also chafe and fret in this our prison-house, longing to be free.

5. *Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God,*

While they are contrary to the old nature, such aspirations prove the existence of the new nature. You may be quite sure that you have the nature of God in you if you are pining after God; and if your longings are of a spiritual kind, depend upon it you are a spiritual man. It is not in the animal to sigh after mental enjoyments, neither is it in the mere carnal man to sigh after heavenly things. What your desires are, that your soul is.

who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

An earnest, as you all know, is unlike a pledge, in some respects. A pledge has to be returned when the matter which it ensures is obtained: but an earnest is a part of the thing itself. A man has so much wage to take on Saturday night, he receives a part of it in the middle of the week, it is an earnest of the full payment —a part of the payment itself. So the Holy Spirit is a part of heaven itself. The work of the Holy Spirit in the soul is the bud of heaven. Grace is not a thing which will be taken away from us when we enter glory, but which will develop into glory. Grace will not be withdrawn as though it had answered its purpose, but will be matured into glory. What is meant by the Holy Spirit being given to us as an earnest? I believe it signifies, first, that the very dwelling of the Holy Ghost within our soul is the earnest of heaven.

6. *Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at*

home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

Here, then, in the present state we are said to be at home in the body; but we are at home in a very modified sense, for it is a home which is not a home, but only a frail lodging, a temporary tenement to accommodate us till we reach our true and real home in the New Jerusalem. It is such a home as a soldier has in the camp at a bivouac, or as a passenger has when he is crossing from continent to continent. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had each a home, but it was in a strange country, and they were daily looking for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

7. *(For we walk by faith, not by sight:)*

Having been possessed, and actuated, and moved by the principle of faith, he was not content to tabernacle in a body which could only be dwelt in satisfactorily through the influence of the faculty of sight.

8. *We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*

The condition, then, of the Christian, when he is living in faith of resurrection and eternal life, is a condition of continual confidence, a confidence which regards both the life which now is, and the state in which we expect to live before we reach the fullness of the promised glory: a confidence which concerns the present state—for while we are at home in the body we are always confident: a confidence which equally concerns, and rather more, so the state which is to come, for “we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

9. *Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.*

That is our main business; whether we live or whether we die is of no consequence at all, but to be accepted of Christ, so to live is to be well pleasing to God. Be this our heavenly ambition, and may the Holy Spirit graciously

enable us to attain to it!

10, 11. *For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the thing done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your conscience.*

The outside world did not understand the preachers of the gospel; they thought them dreamy enthusiasts, earnest about nothing at all. But Paul says that God understood him, and he hoped, too, that the consciences of those to whom he was writing had also understood him. The truly faithful minister of Jesus Christ may know that there are two approvals that he will be sure to get—the approval of his Master, and the approval of men's consciences. Their prejudice may condemn him, his mode of oratory may not suit their fancy, but their conscience must give quite a different verdict; it must approve the faithful preaching of the gospel.

12, 13. *For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.*

Happy Paul who, as a preacher of the gospel, could write, "If you say that we are beside ourselves, that we are really mad upon religious matters—well, it is to God that we are so. It is not every madman who can say that. "Or if you tell us that we are too serious and sober, it is your case, your cause, that makes us so." Well may we be sober and solemn when we think of the danger in which men's souls continually are.

14, 15. *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*

The life of the saved man must never be lived for himself; he is false to his profession if it is so. He must henceforth live as earnestly for God as, aforetime in his unregeneracy, he lived for himself, for he now has a new life which is not his own, to do with it as he pleases, but it belongs entirely to him who purchased it with his own most precious blood.

16. *Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh, yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.*

We do not see Christ with our natural eyes, we do not hear his voice with our natural ears, he is to us now a spiritual Personage, who communicates with our spirits through his own ever-blessed Spirit.

17. *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.*

There could not be a greater change than that which is wrought by regeneration, it is a new creation, the passing away of the old, and the making of all things new.

18, 19. *And all things are of God, who hath reconciled unto himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not implying their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

The work of reconciliation he committed to his Son; the word of reconciliation he has committed to us. It is our high privilege to tell the tidings of the wondrous work by which God is reconciled, so that, without any violation of his justice, he can have mercy upon those who have offended against him.

20. *Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to*

God.

As if Christ himself stood here, and pleaded with you, he bids his ministers plead on his behalf. In the name of God, he bids us beseech you to be reconciled to God. Ambassadors do not generally beseech men; they stand on their dignity, they make demands for the honor of their sovereign; but Christ's ambassadors know of no dignity which should keep them from pleading with men.

21. *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin;*

In no sense whatever can Jesus Christ ever be conceived of as having been guilty. "He knew no sin." Not only was he not guilty of any sin which he committed himself, but he was not guilty of our sins. No guilt can possibly attach to a man who has not been guilty. He must have had complicity in the deed itself, or else no guilt can possibly be laid on him. Jesus Christ stands in the midst of all the divine thunders, and suffers all the punishment, but not a drop of sin ever stained him. In no sense is he ever a guilty man, but always is he an accepted and a holy one.

Jesus Christ was made by his Father sin for us, that is, he was treated as if he had himself been sin. He was not sin; he was not sinful; he was not guilty; but, he was treated by his Father, as if he had not only been sinful, but as if he had been sin itself. That is a strong expression used here.

Not only hath he made him to be the substitute for sin, but to be sin. God looked on Christ as if Christ had been sin; not as if he had taken up the sins of his people, or as if they were laid on him, though that were true, but as if he himself had positively been that noxious—that God-hating—that soul-damning thing, called sin. When the Judge of all the earth said, "Where is Sin?" Christ presented himself. He stood before his Father as if he had been the accumulation of all human guilt; as it he himself were that thing which God cannot endure, but which he must drive from his presence forever.

that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

I beg you to notice, that it does not simply say that we might be made righteous but "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;" as if

righteousness, that lovely, glorious, God-honoring; God-delighting thing—as if we were actually made that. God looks on his people as being abstract righteousness, not only righteous, but righteousness. To be righteous, is as if a man should have a box covered with gold, the box would then be golden; but to be righteousness is to have a box of solid gold. To be a righteous man is to have righteousness cast over me; but to be made righteousness, that is to be made solid essential righteousness in the sight of God. Well now, this is a glorious fact and a most wonderful privilege, that we poor sinners are made “the righteousness of God in him.” God sees no sin in any one of his people, no iniquity in Jacob when he looks upon them in Christ. In themselves he sees nothing but filth and abomination, in Christ nothing but purity and righteousness.

2 Corinthians 6

1. *We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.*

God's servants are called to take many different positions. They are ambassadors under one aspect; they are workers under another. As ambassadors, they are ambassadors for Christ, as workers, they are workers together with God. Oh, how much it costs to win a soul! I mean, not only how much it cost the Savior, so that he broke his very heart over it, and poured out his life's blood—but also how much it must cost the messenger of peace! He must know how to beseech and implore; and when even this fails, he must still go on toiling, laboring, as a worker together with God.

2. *(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)*

The apostle here quotes from the forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah, the eighth verse. In that passage the Lord God is speaking to the Messiah, speaking to our Lord Jesus Christ, and he says to him, "In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee." The first part, then, of this verse is a quotation from Isaiah; the second part of the verse is Paul's commentary upon the passage, "Behold, now is the accepted time."

3-10. *Giving no offense in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: but in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by*

pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown and yet well known, as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

All these things Paul and his brethren were to be and to do in order to win souls for Christ; just as the hunters in the cold North seek after furs, and try all sorts of plans to catch the wild creatures on which they grow. They will trap them, or snare them, or shoot them; but, somehow or other, they will get them. They will be on the alert all day, and all night, too. They will learn the habits of every creature they have to deal with, but they will get the furs somehow. And so must the true minister of Christ be willing to be anything, to do anything, to suffer anything, to bear reproach and shame, to be nothing, or to be all things to all men, if by any means he may save some.

11, 12. *O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels.*

If they were not saved, it was not because Paul did not open his mouth to speak to them, and to warn and invite them, nor because he did not open his heart, and feel, in his very bowels, the movements of a sacred compassion for them.

Now, having thus spent himself in his endeavor to bring them to Christ, he writes to those whom he did bring—

13. *Now for a recompence in the same,*

There must be some wages for this blessed work. The apostle wisely puts it on that footing, as if, surely, they were indebted to him, but the payment that he seeks is, of course, no personal gain to him; he only puts it in that form, but it is

a gain to them.

(I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.

“There has been so much earnest labor to secure your conversion, so be ye also in earnest to bring in others. Get large thoughts of God; be fully consecrated to him, spend and be spent for him. Follow a good example.”

Paul could well urge them to that consecration when he had given himself so completely to the work of winning souls: “Be ye also enlarged.”

14. *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers:*

Not in any way—neither in marriage which is the chief of all forms for yoking, nor yet in business or other partnerships.

For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?

You must be in the same world with them, but keep yourself distinct from them. Go not into their society by your own choice, nor seek your pleasure with them.

15. *And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?*

What union can he have with men that love sin? How can they that are of the world, who love the world, be said to be members of the Head who is in heaven, in the perfection of his glory?

16. *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people.*

Yes, God has entered into covenant relations with us, bound himself by promise,

and yet further by another immutable thing, in which it is impossible for him to lie, namely, by his oath. There are between us and our God bonds which cannot be snapped, links that can never be severed.

17. *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing;*

t were strange if the decree of separation should engender an unholy union. It cannot be. I deny, once for all in the name of all who hold the truth—I deny solemnly, as in the presence of God, that we have any thought that because God has separated us, therefore we ought to go and live as others live. No, God forbid. Our separation is a ground and motive for our separating altogether from sinners.

18. *And I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*

Is not that “coming out” necessary to sonship, and were they his sons, were they his daughters, had they any claim or right to call him Father, until they came out from the midst of a wicked world, and were separate?

2 Corinthians 7

1. *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved,*

By such word “Having therefore these promises”, I understand not merely having the promises in reversion, as they belonged to the Jews, but having them in seizing, having received them, having obtained them, having gob them, having grasped them, and being seized of them, as lawyers express it, so that the promises are no longer mere promises, but things which we have actually in our possession. I understand, by Paul’s language here, that believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have a thousand blessed promises, in the enjoyment of which they daily live.

The promises he especially refers to are mentioned in the previous chapter. They appear to be these; first, divine indwelling: “I will dwell in them.” The next is divine communion: “I will dwell in them, and walk: in them.” As God talked with Abraham, so he doth with every believer. God is not to us afar off, but he is our near and dear friend, our close acquaintance.

Another promise we have obtained is that of divine covenanting: “and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” God gives himself to his people to be theirs, and they, by the purchase of his own, Son, and by the effectual conquest of the arm of his grace, are his. He hath chosen us for his inheritance, and granted to us that he should become our portion and our inheritance.

The fact that we are absolutely and unconditionally saved by God’s grace, that our standing is secured, that we have become the children of God, is not an incentive to careless walking and to unholy living.

let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,

The Christian man, while he is acted upon by divine influence, and is cleansed by the Holy Spirit is also an active agent of his own sanctification. He is not like the vessels and the pots of which the apostle speaks, that were cleansed under the law; but man is a free agent, and the holiness which God works in him, is not the pretended holiness of candlesticks and altars, but it is the holiness of a responsible being—a holiness which is not forced upon him, but which his whole soul gives consent unto. He purges himself. Depend upon it, you and I do not grow holy by going to sleep.

Your eye must not spare, your heart must not pity, one pet sin. Most man would fain be holy if it were not for some one sin that they vainly flatter themselves to be innoxious and harmless." From all filthiness let us cleanse ourselves.

perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

An abiding sense of God's presence, a perpetual feeling of our obligations to our Creator, produces a reverent fear of God—not the slavish, servile fear which brings torment, but the fear which bows the tall archangel in adoration before the throne, the fear which makes the cherub veil his face with his wings while he adores the Lord. Such a constant fear as this is the mainspring of Christian holiness.

2-5. *Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man. I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you. Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation. For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.*

Do not think, therefore, my dear brother or sister, if in working for Christ you get thoroughly cast down and sick of yourself, that you are undergoing an experience unknown to the sons of God. It is by no means so. Trembling takes hold on all in turns; faintness is common enough on all hands. Fear, like the mist of the valley, steals over the very garden of the Lord, and there is not a flower in

all the borders which is not at times bowed down with the weight of the chilly damp.

6, 7. *Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; and not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more.*

Ministers, who are really sent of God, greatly rejoice in the spiritual prosperity of their people. If they see God's word prosper, they prosper; if the church of God is blessed, they are blessed. Their life is wrapped up in the spiritual life of their people. Never is the servant of God so full of delight as when he sees that the Holy Spirit is visiting his hearers, making them to know the Lord, and confirming them in that heavenly knowledge.

8-10. *For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

Some persons seem to think that mere sorrow of mind in reference to sin is repentance; but it is not. Read the text, and you will at once see that it is not. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance." Therefore, it is not itself repentance. It is an agent employed in producing repentance, but it is not itself repentance. There is, in the world, a great deal of sorrow on account of sin which is certainly not repentance, and never leads to it. Some transgressors are sorry for sin for a time; they are convicted of guilt, with a transitory conviction, which soon passes away.

There is many a dog that gets back to his vomit as soon as he can, and there is many a sow that is sorry for being washed, and glad enough to get back again to wallow in the mire. But that is not the kind of change that the apostle mentions

here. True godly sorrow is that which leads to repentance never to be repented of, for the man says, “No, I left my sin; and if I wanted to go back to it, I have plenty of opportunity to do so; but I cannot go back to it, I hate it. There,” says he, “I have been tempted over and over again, and my feet had well-nigh slipped; but the eternal life within me, kept there by the Spirit of God, has driven me back to Christ. I could not do this great wickedness, and sin against God. I have smarted too much already to put my hand again into the fire. I grieved my God too much, and brought too much grief upon my own heart, for me again to play the fool, and once more to go into the purlieus of iniquity.” Happy is that man who has had enough of the smart of sin to make it sour and bitter to him all the rest of his days; so that now, with changed heart, and renewed spirit, he perseveres in the ways of God, never thinking of going back, but resolved “through floods or flames” to force his way to heaven, to be, by divine grace, master over every sin that assails him.

11. *For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.*

The true believer, when he gets his Savior in full possession, and in blissful communion, is so jealous lest any rival should intrude in his heart; be is afraid lest his dearest friend should get more of his heart than the Savior has. He is afraid of his wealth; he trembles at his health, at his fame, at everything that is dear to him, lest it should engross his heart

12-16. *Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you. Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all. For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed; but as we spake all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth. And his inward*

affection is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him. I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things.

Ministers, who are really sent of God, greatly rejoice in the spiritual prosperity of their people. If they see God's word prosper, they prosper; if the church of God is blessed, they are blessed. Their life is wrapped up in the spiritual life of their people. Never is the servant of God so full of delight as when he sees that the Holy Spirit is visiting his hearers, making them to know the Lord, and confirming them in that heavenly knowledge.

2 Corinthians 8

The apostle is writing concerning a certain collection which was being made for the poor saints of Jerusalem. It was from Jerusalem that the gospel had spread into Greece, and, therefore, those who had received spiritual things from the poor Jews at Jerusalem were bound by every tie of holy brotherhood to remember their benefactors in the time of famine. The apostle stirs up the Corinthian Church about this contribution.

1. *Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;*

That is a quaint old expression, “We do you to wit.” It means, “We would let you know, we would tell you, we would inform you of what the Macedonia saints have done;” and he does not at first say, “We would let you know of the liberality which the Macedonia churches have shown;” but, “of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.” What we do for God, God’s grace has first bestowed upon us. If there be any virtue, if there be any zeal, if there be any faith, if there be any love, it is the result of the grace of God bestowed upon us. Always look upon things in that light, for then you will not grow proud. Give what you may, and do what you may, you may regard it as the elect of the grace of God bestowed upon you.

2. *How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of the joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.*

It is good to stir one Christian up by the example of another, and Paul excites those at Corinth by the example of the churches in Macedonia—especially, no doubt, the church at Philippi. They were very poor people in Macedonia but they loved God so much that they abounded in liberality. Considering how little they

possessed, and how much they were tried and persecuted, they had been wonderfully generous.

3. *For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;*

They were willing to give even beyond their power. They gave up to the full limit of what they could do, and then wished that they could give even more. And notice that "they were willing of themselves." Paul had not to stir them up to do this, nor even to mention the subject to them: "They were willing of themselves." That is the best kind of service to God which a man ever does, that in which he is willing of himself. It is the slave who is flogged to his work, the child is willing of himself. Oh, that on the altar of God, you and I may gladly place our offerings because we have been made willing of ourselves!

4. *Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.*

Paul did not have to beg them to give, but they begged him to take their gifts; and when the saints of God are in a right state, they come forward voluntarily, as Paul says that these Macedonian Christians did, "praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints" by going to Jerusalem and giving away this money where it was needed.

5, 6. *And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God. Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.*

Paul said, "Titus, do not let the Corinthians be behind the Macedonians in this matter. Go and show them how they may receive similar grace."

7. *Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye*

abound to this grace also.

These Corinthians were an instructed people, they were so well taught that they were able to carry on an open meeting for years without a minister, and the natural consequences followed, they fell into sixes and seven, and there were divisions among them, so that Paul had to counsel them to have a minister: “I beseech you, brethren, ye know the house of Stephanas that it is the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints, that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.” They were a notable church, people of standing among them; Paul admits all that, but he says, “Do not be behindhand in your liberality to the canoe of God.”

8. *I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.*

And, Christian men and women, whenever you see other Christians excelling you in any grace, seek to catch up with them; why should you be in the rear rack? You are to run with patience the race that is set before you, so do not be outstripped by your fellow-runners. If God has given to one Christian much of any grace, he can, if he pleases, give as much to you.

9. *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*

“You know the wonderful story of how you are rich through Christ’s poverty. What a charge it was for him from the riches of heaven to the poverty of his manhood here, and what a change it is for you from the poverty of your sin and ruin to the riches of his grace! Now you know this, you do not need anybody to tell you about it, so imitate it, distribute to the poor, and especially to the poor saints, as you have the power and the opportunity.”

10. *And herein give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to beforehand a year ago.*

They had begun last year—perhaps not a year ago, but some months ago in the previous year—to talk the matter over, and to make promises; and they had been among the first to undertake the work, but as yet they had not done it.

11. *Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have.*

They had not a minister, you see, and what is everybody's business is nobody's business, and so the contribution was not carried out. And in general the church at Corinth is about the worst in the New Testament, and that for this very reason —that it had not any oversight. It was the pattern church of certain brethren whom we have among us this day—in the very example of them, and they quote this as an example, whereas it is put here as a beacon, and a very excellent beacon, too, to warn us against any such thing. Everything was sixes and sevens, good people as they were. Seeing that they had no order and no discipline, nothing got done, and they wearied the apostle's life because of that. God would have things done decently and in order, and he gives to his churches pastors after his own heart, and when he does, then is the church able to carry out her desires and her activities with something like practical common-sense. But here a year ago, months ago, they had talked the matter over, and made a promise, and now he has to say to them, "Now therefore, perform the doing of it." They had no deacons to look them up, I will be bound to say.

12. *For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.*

This is how we should always act—see what we can do, and do it, not wait till we can do twice as much. There is a great waste of holy effort and of holy giving because so many people are ashamed to do a little, and therefore do nothing because they cannot do much. That is not the way for God's children to act. With your willing mind do what you can, and God will help you to do more.

13, 14. *For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your*

want: that there may be equality:

Paul would have the rich church at Corinth give to the poor church at Jerusalem for the Corinthians themselves might be in need some day, and then the church at Jerusalem would in turn give to them. This is the law of the kingdom; if God prospers you, help another who is not being prospered just now; and then, one of these days, he also may help you in your time of necessity.

15. *As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.*

That was the law of the manna in the wilderness. Some people brought in a good deal, for they had a great many children, and so it was all eaten up.

Some brought in a little, but God multiplied it, so that there was no lack. So, if, in providence, God gives you a large supply of good things, divide it among a large number of needy ones; and if he gives you only a small measure, be content, and do your best with it.

16. *But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you.*

Titus thought of them as Paul did; they were like-minded in this as in many other matters.

17, 18. *For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you. And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches;*

I do not know who “the brother” was. There have been many guesses but perhaps none of them were right. You see that human praise, even in the church, is not a very lasting thing. There was somebody whom all Christians praised; yet, now, nobody knows him. So, if you get to be esteemed among men, you may be unknown, even as this good man is; but if you have the praise of God, he

will never forget you.

19. *And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace,*

Paul did not like handling the money at all. They had to press him to do it, and then he sent Titus and somebody else to take charge of it, and to keep a strict account so that they should never be blamed in the matter of this distribution. So, beloved, see that you so serve God that even the devil cannot find fault with you. Be so exact, especially with what is given to God's cause, that no man shall ever even think that you have taken any of it to yourselves.

19, 20. *Which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind: Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us:*

He had other brethren associated with him, lest anybody should even hint that Paul was benefited thereby. And, oh! in the distribution of the Lord's money, it becomes us to be exceedingly careful. Paul adds this.

21. *Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.*

The apostle is very particular and careful, and herein he sets an example to all of you who have anything to do with any work for God. Do not let it rest on yourselves alone; have others associated with you to share the responsibility, and help you to look after it.

22, 23. *And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but not much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have in you. Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellow-helper concerning you:*

"If anybody outside wants to know who Titus is, say that I have sent him to be

the leader in this particular work. If you want to know who he is, he is ‘my partner and fellow-helper concerning you.’” Well said, Paul.

23. *Or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers of the churches and the glory of Christ.*

How beautiful to see Paul so praising his brethren—very humble, commonplace persons as compared with himself, but he admires the grace of God in them. How very different from the general spirit of depreciation that you find even among Christian men—afraid to praise anybody, lest they should be exalted above measure. You might leave that to the devil.

He will take care that they are not exalted above measure but you need not be as particular about that. Often the best thing that can be done for God’s servant is to encourage him, for, though you may not know it, he may have a multitude of depressions, heavy toil and earnest care, and much watching, which may bring him down. Paul speaks well of the brotherhood: let us try to do the same. But how does he call these simple-minded men, who are going with him to distribute this money? Does he call them the glory of Christ? Yes; Christ is the glory of God, and his people are the glory of Christ. He glories whenever he is glorified by them. They are the result of the travail of his soul, and in that sense they are his glory.

24. *Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf.*

Where there is true love in the heart it becomes a working principle. It does not lie dormant, but it works—works abundantly. It is a vital principle, and where there is life there is movement, and a measure of activity. It is a principle that grows, and out of its growth there comes fruit. For these reasons, and in these ways, true believers give sure proofs of the love that is in their hearts.

2 Corinthians 9

1-5. *For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you: for I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.*

We ought to be like the honeycomb, dropping spontaneously with virgin honey, all too glad if we may but be accepted in our gifts through him who is the altar, and who renders both the offerer and the offering acceptable unto God. We ought not to need to be preached at, to be exhorted, and to be pressed by public appeals and private solicitations. It should be said of us as of the church at Corinth, "Touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you." Be a proportionate giver, then, and a willing giver.

6. *But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*

It is the best way to bless ourselves to be earnest in blessing others. In temporals, I have known men give to God by the shovelfuls, and God sent silent wagon loads by the back door; they could not send back their substance as fast as he

sent it in. Your mean skinflints have gone on flint-skinning until they died, and have left hardly enough to be buried with respectably, while others have scattered and yet increased.

7. *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*

"Not grudgingly," not giving as though you wished you could avoid it, and therefore giving as little as possible, counting the pence, and reckoning them to be as precious as drops of blood, but giving with an ease, a spontaneousness, a freeness, a pleasure; this is a cheerful giver.

Much has been said about giving the tenth of one's income to the Lord. Methinks that is a Christian duty which none should for a moment question. If it were a duty under the Jewish law, much more is it so now under the Christian dispensation. I do not, however, like to lay down any rules for God's people, for the Lord's New Testament is not a great book of rules; it is not a book of the letter, for that killeth, but it is the book of the Spirit, which teacheth us rather the soul of liberality than the body of it, and instead of writing laws upon stones or paper, it writes laws upon the heart.

A man who gives to God cheerfully has got beyond the serf-like, slavish spirit. The slave brings his pittance, which he is obliged to pay, and puts it down at the task-master's feet, and goes his way in misery. But the dear child, so pleased to give its Father what it can, places its little offering into the Father's treasury, as much as possible unobserved of men, beholds the Father smile, and goes its way rejoicing.

8-11. *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.*

If the manna did not fail for forty years, neither will the Lord fail to supply thy needs. Thy God will give thee thy livery, if thou art his servant. He will give thee thy daily rations also, if thou servest him. “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” He who carves for himself will cut his fingers, and got an empty plate; but he who waits for the great Host of all the chosen family to carve for him shall have enough, and that of the best. “My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

12-15. *For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; and by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.*

Paul finishes by reminding them of a greater gift that any they could bring, and by this one short word of praise, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift,” he sets all their hearts a-singing. Let men give as liberally as they may, you can always proclaim the value of their gift; you can cast it up, and reckon its worth; but God’s gift is unspeakable, unreckonable. You cannot fully estimate the value of what God gives. The gospel is a gospel of giving and forgiving. We may sum it up in those two words; and hence, when the true spirit of it works upon the Christian, he forgives freely, and he also gives freely. The large heart of God breeds large hearts in men, and they who live upon his bounty are led by his Spirit to imitate that bounty, according to their power.

2 Corinthians 10

1, 2. *Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you: but I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.*

This chapter presents the remarkable spectacle of a minister of the gospel of peace going forth to war. At first sight we wonder how the meek and gentle Paul should speak about warring and talk of pulling down strongholds, and "having a readiness to revenge all disobedience." The surprise is all the greater because he is going to war in the church: a shepherd entering the fold with a sword. One would not so much marvel that he carried his weapons against the outside world, but on this occasion it is within the church at Corinth that he is about to commence a campaign. Yet observe how earnestly he deprecates the conflict, how he beseeches them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ to spare him a task which was so unpleasant to his feelings as to deal sternly with those whom he would far rather have commended.

3, 4. *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal,*

He is not about to assault his antagonists in the church with bitter words of railing such as they used against himself; he is not about to meet the philosophers with such philosophies and sophisms as those with which they assailed the gospel; neither is he coming forth with any kind of temporal weapon to inflict aught of injury upon the leaders in error; his weapons are of a very different sort. They are not carnal, but spiritual.

but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal"; yet the spiritual weapons which can be wielded by the Christian minister, and indeed by every Christian man, are not to be despised, for while not fleshly, they are mighty through God. God is in them; God is with those who use them. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, the arrows of truth which pierce the consciences of men, the weapon of all prayer, the influence of the Holy Ghost—that divine power-such weapons as these are by God's power made mighty to the overthrow of spiritual principalities and powers. Truth and holiness are the appointed engines for the pulling down of the castles of evil. Blessed is he who in every conflict for God takes heed to use none other weapons than those which the Lord hath hung up in the tower of David, builded for an armoury, wherein do hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. Those only can fight the Lord's battles successfully who come to him to be armed for the fight, and reject all fleshly force. The spiritual shall be victorious, but others must fail.

5. *Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;*

Monarchs of the olden times, such as the kings of Assyria and Babylon, when they subdued a country, removed the people to a distance away from their old haunts, to find new homes. Now, when the Lord captivates the thoughts of our mind he leads them all away, conducting them to another reason altogether. The offspring of the mind he guides into the spiritual realm, wherein they delight in the Lord, and bow themselves before him. Let us see this procession of captives led away to grace the triumph of the conqueror and to settle down in another region under another King than they ever knew before. From the highest to the lowest all the faculties of the soul are made to pass under the yoke

6. *And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.*

Paul declared that when he came among them armed with the power with which God had clothed him, he should overthrow every proud opposition, and convince

them all of the truth to their conversion or to their confusion.

7, 8. *Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's. For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:*

I read in a certain learned divine the other day a declaration that the evangelical doctrine which we preach is not Christianity, but Paulinism. By that utterance this divine condemned himself. John saith, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." He who hears not the apostles hears not their Master. He who dares say that Paul has not given us the gospel is not of Christ: for Jesus saith, "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." The testimony of the Holy Ghost by apostolic lips is as sure as the testimony by the Son of God himself; and it is flat rebellion against the Holy Ghost to graduate his utterances, whether they be through prophets, apostles, or the Christ himself.

9, 10. *That I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters. For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.*

The Corinthians were the critics of the apostles' age. They took to themselves great credit for skill in learning and in language, and as most men do who are wise in their own esteem, they made a wrong use of their wisdom and learning—they began to criticise the apostle Paul. They criticized his style. "His letters," say they, "are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible."

The fault of the Corinthians is the fault of the present age. Let not any one of you, as he goeth out of the house of God, say unto his neighbor, "How did you like the preacher? What did you think of the sermon this morning?" Is that the question you should ask as you retire from God's house? Do you come here to judge God's servants?

11, 12. *Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present. For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*

He that thinks more of himself than he should is so far intoxicated with conceit; but he that judges aright and is, therefore, humble, thinks soberly. God give us to be very sober in our thoughts of ourselves.

13-16. *But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you. For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ: not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand.*

It was not enough for Paul to preach the gospel at Jerusalem or Damascus, he must needs journey into Pisidia and Pamphylia, he must journey to the utmost verge of Asia Minor, and then, so full of Christ is he, that he dreams of eternal life, and when he falls asleep, he hears in a vision a man of Macedonia across the blue Aegean, entreating him, "Come over and help us." And with the morning light Paul rises, fully resolved to take ship and preach the gospel among the Gentiles. Having preached Christ throughout all Greece, he passed over to Italy, and though chained, he entered as God's ambassador within the walls of the imperial city of Rome; and it is believed that after that, his sacredly restless spirit was not satisfied with preaching throughout Italy, but he must needs cross into Spain, and it is said even into Britain itself. The ambition of the Christian for Christ was boundless; beyond pillars of Hercules, to the utmost islands of the sea, believers in Jesus carried the news of a Savior born for the sons of men.

17, 18. *But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.*

Those men who really know the Lord feel that such is the greatness of his glory, that it takes up all our faculties, absorbs all our powers, demands indeed our whole energy, and we cannot spare time, or love, or skill, or power, or thought for any other topic. Let the Lord be gloried in, and him alone, because the Lord alone is worthy to be gloried in. He only is great, he is the blessed and only Potentate, from him only cometh our salvation, he is God alone, therefore in one rolling flood let all our glorying cheerfully flow at his feet.

2 Corinthians 11

1. *Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.*

In his heart he was saying all the while, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. *For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*

He had an earnest, cautious, anxious concern for their holiness, that the Lord Jesus might be honored in their lives. Certainly, our Lord Jesus Christ will not accept the professing church of these days on any other terms. Let thy heart be loyal and true to him, or else thou wilt stir up the holy jealousy of thy God.

3. *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

A serpent is very insinuating. It can enter where another creature could not. Ever so small an opening makes room for a serpent, and it winds itself in without noise. Satan is very insinuating; and as he entered Paradise, so can he penetrate into the most secret and sacred places. He creeps into the church, watch though we may. He creeps into houses though sanctified by devotion. Have you never found him intruding into your closet during your prayer? There may seem to be no loophole, and yet there he is, where he was least expected. Has he not wound himself into your families? Has he not crops into your hearts? How can we keep

him out? We watch against his attacks from without; but, behold, he has found a lodging-place within! Subtle and insinuating is Satan: he is a serpent indeed!

4. *For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.*

A lie ye will believe, but because the gospel is true ye do not believe it. “You give us a bad character,” says one. It is your true character. Some of you are so in the habit of accepting no teaching but that which chimes in with your depraved tastes and sceptical notions, that because the gospel is true, and therefore comes across your vitiated tastes, you cannot endure it. If we were to trim it a little, and cut it down, and make it suit you, you would accept it; but in the name of the everlasting God we assure you we will not do it: we dare not do it for God’s sake, nor even for your sakes, for to preach to you another gospel would only be to deceive you.

Our gospel is the best of gospels, the richest of gospels, it cannot be excelled, it cannot be equaled; in fact, it is the only gospel that is worthy of the name. You remember how Paul wrote to the Galatians, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from, him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel, which is not another;” that is to say, it is not another gospel, and it brings only a curse both upon him who preaches it and those who receive it.

5, 6. *For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have been throughly made manifest among you in all things.*

The great wonders of apostolic times were mainly wrought by men who were illiterate in the world’s judgment; they had been taught of Christ and so had received the noblest education, but in classical studies and in philosophical speculations they were but little versed, with the exception of the apostle Paul, and he came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom. Yet the apostles and their followers preached with such power, that the world soon felt their presence.

7-10. *Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself. As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.*

Paul taught that the minister of God had a right to be supported by the people. "If ye partake of heir spirituals," says he, "it is right that you give of your temporals." He insists upon it that they are not to muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn; yet, though he holds this as a great general principle, he never takes anything himself; he follows his trade of tentmaking; he stitches away at the canvas, and earns his own living, so that he is chargeable unto no man.

11-13. *Wherefore? because I love you not? God knoweth. But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.*

As there were false apostles of yore, so there are foul apostates in these days. Their profession is only the prelude to their perfidy. They make solemn pledge to obey him, but, like Judas, they only wait a suited opportunity to betray him. They will sell the Savior for silver; only let the price be high enough, their principle is low enough; their conscience will not hesitate to "crucify the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame."

14, 15. *And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be*

according to their works.

The devil knows how to transform himself into an angel of light, and then, plausibly and smoothly, he teacheth false doctrine and error, and all the while appeareth to have a holy zeal for truth, and the most earnest love for that which is delicate and lovely, and of good repute. We have plenty of specimens in these days of the devil teaching morality. You sometimes take up a newspaper of the sceptic or scorpion school, whose writers hate all true religion as much as the devil hates virtue, and you find a most unctuous article upon the indelicacies of some honest preacher, or a very pious lamentation over the presumed follies of an earnest minister. Never let the devil accuse Christians of cant and hypocrisy again, let him find his answer in his own dear allies who can plead for the sanctity of places which they abhor and for a solemnity which they despise. Of all devils the most devilish is the saintly hypocrite loving sin, and yet pleading against it in order to promote it.

16, 18. *I say again, Let no man think me a fool; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.*

If any man might have had confidence in the flesh, truly Paul might.

19, 20. *For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.*

Return not to the beggarly elements of a merely outward religion, but keep close to the worship of God in spirit and in truth, for this is the liberty of the children of God.

21, 22. *I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also. Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.*

Paul was proud of his extraction as a Jew. Taking this expression in its literal sense, I feel that he had much to be proud of. Judah's banner must not rank second among the nations. The nation of Israel is most ancient and most honorable. When as yet Greece and Rome were not known, God had brought forth his people out of Egypt "with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm," and had cast out Amorite and Perizzite, to make room for the vine which he had brought out of Egypt. Poets, statesmen, philosophers, divines, had all come to ripeness and the fullness of strength in Judah's land, while as yet the other nations were sunken in barbarism.

The people of Israel were famous because of God's election. As a nation they deserve honor, but as the elect of God they must stand high in our esteem. One little stream of pure love and truth went wandering amidst the arid wastes of human depravity. The election of grace fell mainly, I might almost say entirely, within the twelve tribes that sprang from the loin of Jacob in those early days. They were the conservators of the lamp of truth. Theirs were the oracles, and grandest and best of all, of them, "as concerning the flesh, Christ came." Never despise the Jew when you remember that, while our Savior was a man, yet he was a man of that peculiar type. Let us think of the Jew, Jehovah-Tsidkenu, the Son of Mary, and feel a sympathy for ever with his flesh and blood.

23-27. *Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*

At first sight it seems that there was somewhat in Paul whereof he might glory. He walked with God, and was like his Master and Lord. He was a humble but admirable imitation of the Lord Jesus, and the mind that was in Christ was also in him: he was a noble man; take him for all in all we know not where to find his

like. His was one of the most beautiful, well-balanced, forceful, and influential of human characters, and yet it would have been a most injurious thing to him to have trusted in himself in any degree. He was singularly judicious, far-seeing, and prudent, and yet he might not rely on himself. If this he so: if his revelations from God, if his deep experience, if his intense consecration, if his remarkable wisdom, if his splendid education, if his logical mind, and fervent spirit—if all these combined could not warrant him in trusting to himself, what folly would be ours if we became self-sufficient? If a lion's strength be insufficient, what can the dogs do? If the oak trembles, how can the brambles boast?

28, 29. *Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?*

When the Holy Spirit had anointed the apostles, they all became ardent enthusiasts for the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom. Having the whole world committed to them that they might enlighten it, they labored most ardently each one in his sphere to spread abroad the truth of the gospel; but the apostle of the Gentiles labored more abundantly than they all. Into how many countries did he carry the testimony of Christ! How often did he cross the sea, traverse mountains, and ford rivers!

One sees in his career something more than an ordinary Christian life; he was so indefatigable in service, that surely nothing beyond could have been possible to humanity, even under the help of God. His public labors were not only abundant, but they were the cause of continual inward conflict. He never preached a sermon, wrote epistle, or attempted a work, without earnest prayer and soul-consuming zeal. Night and day with tears, he said of a certain church that he had labored for its good. He was a man so whole hearted and intense in all that he did, that we ought to remember not merely the amount of his labors, but the way in which he wore out himself by the intensity of his zeal in them. Probably never man led a more intensely ardent life than be.

Moreover, added to all this, he carried a weight of care enough to crush him; for there came upon him the care of all the churches—to plant them, to defend them against rising errors, to prevent schisms from dividing the flock, to lead in the converts from grace to grace, to instruct them, and to present every one perfect before God. The burden resting upon the apostle was greater than the cares of all

empire; and then, as if to complete the whole, he was called to suffer persecutions of which he has given us a list, which as we read it makes us shudder that one man should have endured so much, and makes us also glory in humanity that it should be possible that so much should be borne and done for God by a single individual.

30-33. *If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.*

I never heard of a more precious basketful of material than that. Sometimes, the greatest of men may owe their safety to the very poorest of instruments; and I think it is the duty of a Christian to avoid trouble if he can, just as our Lord bade his disciples, when they were persecuted in one city, to flee to another. Paul was carrying out that command of his Master. It was not cowardice, it was the very soul of courage, that he might go elsewhere to proclaim the gospel that he had received in Damascus.

2 Corinthians 12

1, 2. *It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.*

His body was here on earth still alive, and yet his spirit was caught away into heaven, the question with him was, whether he was in the body or out of the body, and I dare say his metaphysical mind often tried to untie that knot. His soul must have remained in the body to keep the body alive, and if so, how could it go up to heaven; and yet into heaven he was quite clear that he had entered. At last the apostle came to the conclusion that whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell, but God knew.

Fourteen long years rolled away, and the apostle never told anybody that he had been caught up into the third heaven. I gather from the way in which he puts it here, that he never mentioned it to a soul. This was singular. Why, if I were caught up into the third heaven, I should tell you of it the first time I had the chance of addressing you; and I warrant that most here would not be long before they would impart to their friends the blessed secret.

3-6. *And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of*

me.

He had been caught up into the third heaven; secret things which had not been seen before were laid bare before his gaze; nor was his eye alone filled: his ear also was sated, for he heard words which it was not possible for him to repeat, and which, could he have repeated, it would not have been expedient for him even to whisper in the unpurified ears of mankind. He had been taken into the innermost part of the third heaven, into that secret paradise where Christ dwells with his perfected saints. He had entered into the nearest communion with God, possible to a man while yet in this life.

7. *And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations,*

Should he not feel somewhat exalted? Surely exultation must fill that man's bosom who has been brought within the veil to see his God, and to hear the unutterable harmonies! It was natural that he should be exalted, and it was not unnatural that he should stand in danger of being exalted above measure. Devout exaltation very rapidly degenerates into self-exaltation. When God lifts us up, there is only one step further—namely, our lifting up ourselves; and then we fall into serious mischief indeed. I wonder how many among us could bear to receive such revelations as Paul had? O God, thou mayest well in thy kindness spare us such perilous favors! We have neither head nor heart to sustain so vast a load of blessing.

there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me,

Now, note every word here. First, he says, "There was given to me." He reckoned his great trial to be a gift. It is well put. He does not say, "There was inflicted upon me a thorn in the flesh," but "There was given to me." This is holy reckoning. O child of God, amongst all the goods of your house, you have not one single article that is a better touch of divine love to you than your daily cross. You would fain be rid of it, but you would lose your choicest treasure if it were withdrawn. Blessed be God for the crucible and the furnace. "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh," Rich grace bestowed the benison. At first, the

apostle may not have seen his thorn to be a gift, but afterwards, when experience had taught him patience, he came to look at that sharp, pricking, festering torment, as a boon from heavenly Father.

The apostle says, “There was given to me a thorn.” Note that—“a thorn.” If the English word expresses the exact meaning—and I think it is pretty near it—you need not be at a loss to understand the simile. A thorn is but a little thing, and indicates a painful but not a killing trial—not a huge, crushing, overwhelming affliction, but a common matter; none the less painful, however, because common and insignificant. A thorn is a sharp thing, which pricks, pierces, irritates, lacerates, festers, and causes endless pain and inconvenience. Yet it is almost a secret thing, not very apparent to anyone but the sufferer. Paul had a secret grief somewhere, I know not where, but near his heart, continually wherever he might be, irritating him: perpetually vexing him and wounding him.

lest I should be exalted above measure.

This preventative was well adapted to work out its design, for assuredly it would recall the apostle from ecstacies and excitements, and make him feel that he was in the body after all. He said once, “Whether in the body, or whether out of the body, I cannot tell,” but when the thorn in the flesh was tearing him he soon settled that question.

This made him feel he was a man, even as others. He had dreamed, perhaps, that he was growing very angelic, but now he feels intensely human. This made him feel only a man—that, though he was filled so full with God, still he was only a man, and could be filled as full with the devil, too, if deserted by grace. This made him feel that he was a weak man, for he had to do battle with base temptations, temptations that seemed not worth fighting with; he had to be cuffed and buffeted in a small way, like the babes in grace. This made him know that he was a man in danger, and needed to fly to God for refuge; for here he was, ready to be exalted above measure even by divine blessings, and ready to be provoked into sin by the mere buffetings of an evil spirit.

8. *For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*

Anything is a blessing which makes us pray. This thorn compelled Paul to cry unto God, and, having commenced to pray, he resorted to prayer again and again. “I besought the Lord thrice.” It may be that this was the exact number of his special prayers on that point: it may, however, only intimate that he often cried to God for deliverance from this trouble.

Yes, we may be lax in prayer when all things flow with even current, but we multiply prayers when trials increase. In this way, Paul was kept from being proud. The revelations now seemed forgotten, for the thorn in the flesh was the more prominent thing of the two.

There seems to me to be a peculiar fitness in a prayer to Jesus when the temptation came from a messenger of Satan, because the Lord Jesus has endured the like temptation himself, and knows how to succor them that are tempted. Moreover, he has come to earth to destroy the works of the devil. In his lifetime he manifested peculiar power over unclean spirits, and was constantly casting them out from those whom they tormented.

9. *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee:*

Thou art buffeted by this evil spirit, but my grace is sufficient for thy present need. Paul, thou hast been beaten of rods, and stoned and shipwrecked, and in perils often, and in all these my grace has been sufficient; and now I tell thee this present trouble, though it be somewhat different in shape from the rest, is nevertheless such as I am well able to meet. My grace is sufficient for thee in this also. The nearness of an object increases its apparent bulk, and so the affliction under which we are at present laboring seems greater than any we have known before. Past trials appear when we have passed them to have been small things compared with present troubles, and therefore the difficulty is to see the sufficiency of grace for present and pressing afflictions. It is easy to believe in grace for the past and the future, but to rest in it for the immediate necessity is true faith. Believer, it is now that grace is sufficient: even at this moment it is enough for thee. Do not say this is a new trouble, or if you do say it remember the grace of God is always new. Do not complain that some strange thing has happened unto you, or if you do, remember blessings are provided in the grace of God to meet your strange difficulties. Tremble not because the thorn in the flesh is so mysterious, for grace is mysterious too, and so mystery shall be met by mystery.

for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

As long as a portion of strength remains we are but partially sanctified. When our Lord has accomplished in us what he is aiming at, the result will be to empty us out and to make us discover the utter vanity of self. If the Lord ever takes you like a dish and turns you upside down and wipes you right out, and sets you away on a shelf, you will then feel what he means you to feel: that is to say, you will feel as if you were waiting there for the Lord to take you down and use you, and then, be sure, he will come in due time and use you for his honorable purposes, laying meat upon you for his hungry people and making you an ornament at his banquets of love. If you feel yourself to be a full dish, I will tell you what there is in you: you hold nothing but the slops and filthiness of depraved nature. The Lord will never use you till all that is poured out, and you are wiped quite clean and put away with nothing of yourself remaining in you, wherein you may glory. All the saints who are ready to go to heaven feel themselves to be less than the least; but those professors who are by no means ready for glory are highly self conscious, and feel that there is a great deal in them which is very commendable. Those who enter heaven carry nothing of self with them, neither will any of us enter there so long as we talk proudly of our attainments. Those who claim to possess “the higher life” have been heard to boast of their purity, but those who enjoy the highest life in glory cry, “Not unto us! Not unto us, be glory.” It is a mark of fitness for heaven when self is dead and grace alone reigns.

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

What was the power of Jesus? It was power to suffer, power to be made nothing of, power to descend to the very depths for love of God and love of men. There lay his power, in those five conquering wounds, in that majestic mournful face, more marred than that of any man, in that great agonising heart which sent forth sweat of blood when men were to be pleaded for before the Lord. Love and patience were Christ’s power, and even now these subdue the hearts of men, and make Jesus the sufferer to be Jesus the King. Therefore Paul says, “I glory in my infirmities that this same power may tabernacle in me. I triumph in weakness, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sane, that I may suffer, and humble myself, and be obedient, and prove my love to God even

as Jesus did. When I am weak then am I strong”—strong to prove my love by enduring the weaknesses and afflictions which I accept for my Master’s sake.

10. *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

When a man is thoroughly weak—not only partially, but altogether weak—then is he strong. When apart from the Lord Jesus, he is utter weakness, and nothing more—then it is that he is strong. Let me persuade you to make a full confession of weakness to the Lord. Say, “Lord, I cannot do what I ought to do: I cannot do what I want to do: I cannot do what I used to do: I cannot do what other people do: I cannot do what I mean to do: I cannot do what I am sure I shall do: I cannot do what I feel impelled to do; and over this sinful weakness I mourn.” Then add, “Lord, I long to serve thee perfectly, yet I cannot do it. Unless thou help me I can do nothing aright. There will be no good in my actions, my words, my feelings, or my desires, unless thou continue to fill me with thine own holy energy. Lord, help me! Lord, help me!” Brother, you are strong while you plead in that fashion. You can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth you; and he will strengthen you, now that you are emptied of self.

11. *I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.*

It was only because the Corinthians had denied his apostleship, and said, “What does he know concerning divine things?” that he felt bound to vindicate his character, and he would not have told it else.

It is easy for a man to use lowly expressions when he is writing about his own faults and the grace of God which saved him from them; but it is not so easy to maintain the virgin blush of modesty when called in necessary self-defense to vindicate one’s own character, and mention one’s own achievements. Indignation is generally aroused in such a case and humility creeps out of the way: the more wonderful is it then to find Paul esteeming himself as nothing, even when answering the cruel depreciations of his opposers.

12. *Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.*

We have not all the spiritual gifts which were entrusted to the first Christian Church; I do not suppose it would have been wise that we should have had them. The gift of miracles, for instance, if it had continued in the Church, would have attracted the notice of men rather to the supernatural power of God than to the moral and spiritual power of Christ Jesus our Savior as manifested through the Divine Spirit. This great, spiritual battle between right and wrong, which is being fought out in the arena of the world, God never intended to be fought out by mere might and power through the dazzling display of signs and wonders; but he resolved to win the victory by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit: according to that word unto Zerubbabel, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." He intended to work in a spiritual manner upon the hearts of men, and therefore he dispensed with the aid of miracles, which had been necessary in the first stage of the Church's growth. You have no doubt often seen, in the case of a young tree when it is newly planted, that a stout stake is driven in by the side of it, and the sapling is tied to that stake; but when the tree grows bigger and stronger, it needs no such support. So has it been with the Church of Christ on earth. At first it was feeble, and needed to be upheld and sustained by the aid of miracles, and wonders, and signs; but it needs that aid no longer.

13-15. *For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong. Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.*

We all know what the missionary spirit is, and yet we could not any of us exactly describe it. It is a sort of thing that sets a man longing to see others saved, and makes him pant especially for those who have no means of grace in their own lands, that they may have those means carried to them, that they may be saved.

16-19. *But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps? Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.*

So will the Church do, through her ministers, her officers, and, indeed, through all her members if they act up to their duty. She will be watching for the souls of men, especially for those souls that are the saddest, and the most cast down, and the most subject to temptation and to trial; she will watch over them and nurse them.

20. *For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:*

It is natural that the serpent's seed should nibble at our heel, and seek to do us injury; but when the bite comes from a brother—from a child of God, then it is peculiarly painful. Well might the apostle write, "If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." I have lived long enough to see churches absolutely destroyed, not by any external attacks, but by internal contention.

21. *And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.*

It is an awful thing when a man calls himself by the name of Christian, and yet can be foul in language, unchaste in conversation, lascivious in spirit, wicked in life. If any man indulges in fornication and adultery, and yet calls himself a Christian, he will surely come under the curse of God.

2 Corinthians 13

1-3. *This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare: since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.*

He did not care about what they thought of his own speaking: they might throw that to the dogs if they liked; but he was greatly concerned that they should think lightly of the Lord Jesus who spoke in him. If Christ speaks by any one of us, it will ill become us to see him despised, and yet feel no sorrow.

The rebellious Corinthians had spoken ill of the apostle as lacking in power: his personal presence was not commanding, his speech was not fascinating, and so forth. Paul does not deny the charge, nor endeavor to exalt himself, but he glories in his infirmities because the power of God rests upon him. He admits anything they may have to say about his deficiency in natural dignity and elocution, but he declares the general principle of power in weakness, by which the Lord conducts the matters of the gospel dispensation. Power in weakness is the great secret of the gospel mode of working.

4. *For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God.*

That is to say, our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished his mighty purpose by becoming weak; through his weakness he became able to suffer, and to die—in order to save us from the thraldom of sin. This weakness of Christ is the way in which he exerts a wondrous power among men. Because of his being obedient to

death, even the death of the cross, “God also hath highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth.” Because he died in weakness he has become mighty to save by the putting away of sin. Hath he not already finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness? By this sign he conquered: the ensign of his bloody cross is the seal of victory. It is himself wounded, himself hung up as a malefactor, himself dead as a victim on the altar before the most high God: it is himself thus slain which is his power to pardon and to save.

For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

Such must be the power of every Christian worker: we are weak with him, but we shall live with him by the power of God towards those whom we bless. It was said the other day, “It is a wonderful power which a certain man possesses: we see no cause to account for it.” That man will not be true to himself or his Lord if he ascribes that power to his own personal acquirements, for if it be true power it comes from that Spirit who distributeth to every man according to his will. Power belongeth unto God, and that is the case even when he puts a measure of it upon men.

5. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.*

We must again and again examine ourselves. But can we not be certain of our safety? Yes, we can: but certain because we have not shunned the most rigorous self-examinations. If you do not test yourself you may sit down and say, “Oh, I am all right.” Yes, but you may be fostering within your spirit a peace which will end in your final ruin, and you may never open your eyes to your deception till you lift them up in hell. Be ready to be searched. It is well when a man likes a heart-searching ministry, when he says, “Out deep, sir; do not spare me, if I am a hypocrite let me know it.” I like a man whose prayer is, “Lord, let me know the worst of myself, that I may be upright before thee. Search me and try me, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” This is what we want This is the age of shams, sham preaching, and sham hearing, and sham professors: we must strive after realities. There are such things as

common graces, which will not save, and, worse stall, such things as counterfeit graces, which will destroy; therefore, let us see to it that we first examine and then prove ourselves. And what is to be the point of search? “Whether ye be in the faith,” whether what ye believe is true, and whether you truly believe it; whether your faith is the faith of God’s elect: the faith that is of the operation of the Spirit of God, or mere nominal, notional, temporary faith. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.”

Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

It is your hollow dissemblers who resent all questionings, and take umbrage at any suspicions. The man who knows that he has pure gold to sell is not afraid of the aquafortis with which the goldsmith tests it, nor even of the crucible into which he may cast. Not so the impostor who hawks a baser metal; he entreats you to be satisfied with his warranty, though it is as worthless as his wares.

6-10. *But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates. Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection. Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.*

Though he might have come among them if he had liked and said, “I am an apostle; I have supreme power over churches; out of this church I shall eject offenders without any question, for I am among you as your spiritual director,” yet he never used such authority: on the contrary he was the servant of all, patient to the last degree, gentle, humble, condescending, unselfish, fully consecrated. If any one was grieved, Paul was grieved with him; if any suffered trial, Paul was tried. He might have said, as his Master did, “I am among you as he that serveth.” He did, after the divine example, continually wash the saints’ feet. His was a humble manner, for he sought nothing of them but that he might

lead them in the way of holiness and maintain peace in their midst. He was no lord over God's heritage, but the lowliest of them all. He hoped all things, endured all things, believed all things for the sake of those entrusted to his charge. Thus he was a power among them: his evident self-sacrifice made him have more influence at Corinth than all their proud leaders of division. By laying aside authority he became mighty to influence them for good.

11. *Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*

Agree together, you Christian people. Do not be always arguing and discussing. Be of the same mind one towards another. In church life very much must depend upon our unity in mind as well as in heart. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism"—these help to make a good foundation for Christian fellowship.

12. *Greet one another with an holy kiss.*

That was the Oriental manner of greeting, and it means to us, "Greet all the brethren with a hearty shake of the hand." Such tokens of fellowship ought never to be forgotten among the followers of Christ.

13, 14. *All the saints salute you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.*

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are in the midst of the true church of God when that church is in a right and healthy state; and if the triune God be gone away from the church, then her banners must trail in the dust, for her warriors have lost their strength.

This is the glory of the church of God—to have the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost to be her never-failing benediction. What a glory to have Father, Son, and Holy Spirit manifesting the Godhead in the midst of our assemblies, and blessing each one of us.

GALATIANS

Galatians 1

1. *Paul, an Apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead).*

Paul begins this Epistle by stating his commission as an Apostle. In Galatia he had been subjected to the great sorrow of having his Apostleship called in question. Does he, therefore, give up his claim to the office and retire from the work? No, not for a moment! He begins his letter to the Galatians by declaring himself to be "an Apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ." His enemies had said, "Paul was never one of the Savior's twelve Apostles. He is not like those who were trained and educated by Christ, Himself. No doubt he has borrowed his doctrine from them and he is only a retailer of other men's goods." "No, no," says Paul, "I am an Apostle as truly as any other of the twelve! 'Not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.'"

2. *And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia.*

Paul always loved to associate others with him in his Christian service. He was not one who wanted to ride the high horse and to keep himself aloof from his Brethren in Christ. He frequently mentions the true-hearted men who were with him, even though they were far inferior to him in talent and also in Grace. He often joins with himself such men as Timothy and Silvanus, and here he puts in, "all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia."

3. *Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.*

It is the genius of the Gospel to wish well to others. Hence Paul begins the actual Epistle with a benediction—"Grace be to you and peace." Dear Friends, may you all have a fullness of these two good things! Grace rightly comes first and peace afterwards. Peace before Grace would be perilous—no, more, it would be ruinous! But may you always have enough of Grace to lead you on to a deep and joyful peace! The two things go together very delightfully—Grace and peace—and it is the best of Grace, and the best of peace, since they come "from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ."

4, 5. *Who gave Himself for our sins,*

There is the doctrine of the Atonement which Paul always brings into his preaching and writing as soon as he can—"Who gave Himself for our sins." Well does Luther say, "Christ never gave Himself for our righteousness, but he gave Himself for our sins because there was no other way of saving us except by a Sacrifice for sin." The substitutionary Character of Christ's death is always to be noticed. "Who gave himself for our sins."

that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself puts away our sin in order that we may rise out of it and may become a pure and holy people, delivered from this present evil world and brought into obedience to the will of God. Now we come to quite another topic.

6. *I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel.*

The Galatians were a very fickle people. They seem very soon to have left the Gospel—to have adulterated it and to have fallen into Ritualism— into Sacramentarianism, into salvation by works, and all the errors into which people usually fall when they go away from the Gospel.

7. *Which is not another. But there are some that trouble you, and*

would pervert the Gospel of Christ.

"Another Gospel, which is not another," for there are not two gospels, any more than there are two gods. There is one only message from God, of good news to men, and if you turn away from that, you turn away to a lie, to that which will bring you trouble, to that which will pervert you and lead you astray!

8. *But though we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*

Paul is no fanatic, no raving enthusiast, yet he cannot endure the notion of a false Gospel! In his solemn anathema, he includes himself and all the brothers with him, yes, and the very angels of God if they "preach any other Gospel." Let him be accursed, he says, and so he is.

9. *As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed.*

The modern style of speaking is, "Let us fraternize with him. He is a man of original thought. Surely, you would not bind all men down to one mode of speech. Perhaps if he has made mistakes, you will bring him round to your way of thinking by receiving him kindly into your fellowship." "No, no," says Paul, "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that you have received, let him be accursed."

10. *For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*

He would not be the servant of Christ if he pleased men. Those whom we try to please are our masters! If a man tries to please the populace, or to please the refined few, those are his masters and he will be their slave. But if he tries to please his God, then is he a free man, indeed!

11. 12. *But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached*

of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul foresaw what would be said about him later and truly, to this day, the fiercest attack upon Christianity is always made upon the teaching of the Apostle Paul. The men who creep in unawares among us talk glibly about having great reverence for Christ, but none for Paul. Yet Paul is Christ's Apostle! Paul speaks only what was personally revealed to Him by the Lord, Himself, and he is, in everything, to be accepted as speaking by Divine Revelation. Paul was intensely desirous that the Galatian Christians should understand that he was no mere repeater of other men's doctrines, but that what he taught he had received directly from God by supernatural Revelation.

13, 14. *For you have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure, I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.*

He was an out-and-out Jew. He never took up anything without going through with it thoroughly. So, while he believed in Judaism, he really did believe it. He was no hypocrite, no pretender—he fought for it tooth and nail! This was the man who afterwards preached the Christianity he had received from Christ! Evidently he did not borrow it from his parents, for they had taught him quite differently. His religion was not the product of his training, but it came to him from God—to him who seemed to be the most unlikely person in the whole land to ever receive it!

15, 16. *But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.*

He felt divinely called to preach the Gospel. Christ revealed Himself to him on the way to Damascus. As soon as he was converted, he did not wait for anybody

to ordain him, or to teach him further, but he says, “I conferred not with flesh and blood.”

17. *Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were Apostles before me, but went into Arabia.*

No sooner did God reveal Christ to him, so that he knew Jesus to be the Messiah, than he earnestly sought to learn yet more of the Truth of God, not by going up to the Apostles at Jerusalem, to borrow from them, but by getting alone in the waste places of Arabia! There, by thought and meditation upon the Word, and by communion with God, to learn yet more concerning the Divine mysteries.

And returned again unto Damascus.

To bear witness for Christ in the very city where he had gone to persecute the saints!

18. *Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days.*

That is, “after three years,” which showed that he did not go there to receive any commission from Peter. He had been, for three years, working for his Lord and Master before he ever saw the face of an Apostle!

19. *But other of the Apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother.*

He had an interview with the Apostle James. James was probably the chief minister of the Church at Jerusalem, so Paul went and had a conversation with him.

20. *Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.*

“I did not derive my knowledge of Christ from any one of these holy men, therefore I am not an imitator of any other Apostle. I was sent out by Christ, Himself, and instructed by Him by Revelation, so I am an Apostle of Christ as much as any of them.”

21. 22. *Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia and was unknown by face unto the Churches of Judea which were in Christ.*

They did not know him. It is evident that he had not been there to be taught by them, or else they would have recognized their illustrious pupil.

23, 24. *But they had heard only that he which persecuted us in times past now preaches the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me.*

May you and I so live that Christian people may glorify God in us! May they often wonder at the mighty Grace which has worked such a change in us! And as they see us zealous and fervent, may they marvel at the amazing grace of God which has brought us to be so consecrated to Christ.

Galatians 2

1, 2. *Then fourteen years later, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation and communicated unto them that Gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.*

He was sent by the Church at Antioch, but the Church there was guided by revelation, so that Paul is correct in saying, “I went up by revelation”—

3, 4. *Yet not even Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privately to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.*

There were always some among the Jewish converts who insisted that the Gentiles should come under the seal of the Old Covenant if they were to be partakers of the blessings of the Gospel. But to this Paul would never consent—

5. *To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you.*

It is impossible for us to estimate how much we owe to the Apostle Paul! Of all who have ever lived, we who are Gentiles owe more to him than to any other man! See how he fought our battles for us. When our Jewish brethren would have excluded us because we were not of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, how bravely did he contend that if we were partakers of the same faith—Abraham is the father of all the faithful, that he was loved of God and the

Covenant was made with him, not in circumcision, but before he was circumcised—then we are partakers of that Covenant!

6-10. *But of these who seemed to be something, (whatever they were, it makes no matter to me: God shows personal favoritism to no man) for they who seemed to be something added nothing to me: but on the contrary, when they saw that the Gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the Gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter, (for He worked effectually in Peter to the Apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty to me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the Grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.*

One of the first things he did, when there was a famine in Judaea, was to make a collection for the saints in other places, that he might aid the poor Christians.

11-14. *But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed. For before certain men came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas, also, was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If you, being a Jew, live after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compel you the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?*

It must have been very painful to Paul's feelings to come into conflict with Peter, whom he greatly esteemed. But for the Truth's sake, he knew no persons, and he had to withstand even a beloved Brother when he saw that he was likely to pervert the simplicity of the Gospel and rob the Gentiles of their Christian

liberty! For this we ought to be very grateful to our gracious God who raised up this brave champion, this beloved Apostle of the Gentiles!

15, 16. *We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the Law: for by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.*

No mere man can keep the Law of God—no mere man has ever done so. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God! And as an absolutely perfect obedience is demanded by the Law, which knows nothing of mercy, we fly from the Law to obtain salvation by the Grace of God in Christ Jesus! This is the primary Truth of God to be proclaimed by the Christian ministry. It is the foundation stone of all Gospel preaching and yet, somehow or other, such is the hardness of the human heart, that it is the most difficult thing to induce our hearers to build on this foundation. Many of them are always trying to lean upon their own works and so struggling to get back under the old legal dispensation, instead of rejoicing in the liberty of the dispensation of Grace. One objection to the Doctrines of Grace rather than the Doctrine of Law is this, that some think it will lead to sin. The Apostle puts it thus—

17. *But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.*

That would not be caused by the Gospel, but by our disregard of it. For the tendency of the Gospel of Grace is to excite gratitude in those who receive it. If I am freely pardoned, then I must love Him who has thus generously forgiven me. Gratitude is the root of true virtue and the mainspring of all holiness. If there are base-minded men who can suck poison out of this honeycomb, is Christ to be blamed for their evil doing? God forbid! But if, on the other hand, you and I go back to trusting in works, then we are, indeed, guilty in the sight of God.

18, 19. *For I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the Law am dead to the Law, that I might*

live unto God.

"Through my sight of the Law, which I have seen to be so stern that all it can do is to condemn me for my shortcomings, I am driven away from it and led to come and live in Christ Jesus under the rule of Grace—not under the law of Moses." If I once said I would not trust in my good works and now go back to trust in them, I have already, whatever may be my outward conduct, perpetrated a great sin!

20. *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*

I do not know a better epitome of Christian experience than this. This is the daily walk of a true child of God. If he lives after any other sort, then he lives not a Christian's life at all! Christ living in us, ourselves living upon Christ and our union to Christ being visibly maintained by an act of simple faith in Him—this is the true Christian's life.

21. *I do not frustrate the Grace of God: for if righteousness comes by the Law, then Christ is dead in vain.*

Paul is arguing against the idea of salvation by works, or salvation by ceremonies. And he shows, beyond all question, that salvation is by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Mark the strength of the Apostle's argument —"If righteousness comes by the Law, then Christ is dead in sin." That is to say, there was no need for Christ to die—the Crucifixion was a superfluity if men can save themselves by their own good works. Paul is very emphatic about the matter. He puts it as plainly as possible: "If righteousness comes by the Law, then Christ is dead in vain." If a man can be saved by his own works, and willings, and doings, then Christ's death was an unnecessary piece of torture and, instead of being the most glorious manifestation of Divine Love, it was a shameful waste, putting upon Christ a terrible burden of suffering which was totally unnecessary.

Galatians 3

1, 2. *O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ has been evidently set forth, crucified among you?*

These Galatians thought that they were very philosophical and very intellectual, but the Apostle says, “O foolish Galatians!” They thought that they had been led by reason and guided by the learning of their teachers—but Paul calls it witchery —“Who has bewitched you?” he asks, as if anything which led a man to trust in his own works should be as much abhorred as the incantations of a witch! “Who has bewitched you?” It is a dangerous state, it is a devilish snare to be brought into—to be led to trust to frames, feelings, experiences, works, prayers, or to anything else but Christ! It is a strange thing that those who have seen Christ should ever go back to these things! Lord, keep us every day, among our other sins, from our own self-righteous nature! Now the Apostle is going to reason with the Galatians against their self-righteousness.

2. *This only would I learn of you, Received you the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith?*

“You know that the Spirit of God is necessary to salvation. You have received that. Did you get the Spirit through the works of the Law, or by simply hearing the Gospel and believing it?” The answer comes at once if we have received the Spirit! It was by the hearing of faith and not by the works of the Law.

3. *Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?*

“Is this work to be partly God’s and partly your own? And if He has begun it

with a basis of gold, are you to perfect it with your poor dust and clay? Are you so foolish as to attempt to do this?" Surely, the way in which the Christian life begins is the method in which it is to be sustained. "As you have received Christ Jesus, the Lord," the Apostle says in another place, "so walk in Him." If you have begun in the flesh, go on in the flesh, but if you really know that your beginning was in the Spirit, then do not go back to the flesh.

4. *Have you suffered so many things in vain? If it is yet in vain.*

This is another pertinent question.

5. *He therefore that ministers to you the Spirit, and works miracles among you, does He it by the works of the Law, or by the hearing of faith?*

They had miraculous gifts among them as a Church and the Apostle asks them whether these were works of the Law, or whether they were not exercised as the result of faith. The answer is clear. It was the believing man who worked the miracle, not the self-righteous man! Paul is now going to take the Galatians far back in Jewish history.

6. *Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.*

He was not saved by his works, but by his faith. His faith was the means of the imputation to him of the righteousness of the Savior who was yet to come.

7. *Know you therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*

He was the father of the faithful—that is of the believing—not of those who trust in their own works. These are only like Ishmael, who must be cast out of the chosen family—but the true children, the real Isaacs, are those who are born according to the promise of Grace.

8. *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In you shall all nations be blessed.*

That is, “in you, because you are the father of believers. You are a sort of head and prototype of men who believe in Me and so, ‘in you shall all nations be blessed’ and in your Seed, too, as you shall be the father of the Christ, shall all nations be blessed.”

9-10. *So then they which are of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the Law to do them.*

Now, if everyone who has once violated God’s Law is cursed forever, how mad are those who hope to enter Heaven by that very Law which is the gate to shut them out! How dare they confide in that which is their worst enemy—which is sworn to curse them in time and in eternity!

11. *But that no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.*

If then, even those who are just live by faith, how can any expect that they shall live by their works?

12. *And the Law is not of faith: but, The man that does them shall live in them.*

The Law says nothing about faith. It speaks only about doing—“You shall do My judgments, and keep My ordinances, to walk therein: I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes, and My judgments: which if a man does, he shall live in them: I am the Lord.”

13. *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a*

Curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree.

There is the key of the mystery! Christ is our Substitute. He fulfilled the Law's demands by His perfect obedience and He suffered the Law's utmost penalty by His death upon the Cross. And now, all those who believe in Him are forever justified because of what He did for them.

14. 15. *That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Brethren, I speak after the manner of men. Though it is but a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed,*

If it is legally drawn up, signed, sealed and witnessed.

no man disannuls, or adds thereto.

There it stands and an appeal can be made to it in any court of Law where it may be produced.

16. *Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He says not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to your Seed, which is Christ.*

Notice how important a single letter of the Scriptures may be! If vital Doctrine may depend upon the use of a singular or plural noun, therefore let us jealously guard the smallest jot or tittle of the Inspired Word of God.

17. *And this I say, that the Covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the Law which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of no effect. That is clear enough.*

The Covenant made with Abraham and his Seed cannot be affected by anything that was said or done on Sinai. Whatever the Covenant of Works may be, or say,

or do, it comes in more than four centuries after this glorious Covenant of Grace had been signed, sealed and ratified! Therefore it cannot be affected, it must stand fast forever.

18. *For if the inheritance is of the Law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

So, then, we know it is by promise and God must keep His promise—and we must believe it. It must be true and if we do believe it, we shall prove it to be true and it will be fulfilled in every jot and tittle to every believing soul.

19-25. *What purpose, then, does the Law serve?*

Some might argue that as the Law cannot justify, it is useless, but, on the contrary, it serves a very definite purpose, as Paul goes on to show.

It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one. Is the Law then against the promises of God? God forbid! For if there had been a Law given which could have given life, verily righteousness would have been by the Law. But the Scripture has concluded all are under sin,

Or, “shut us all up under sin.” The Law has come and proved us all guilty, and shut us all up as in a great prison from which we cannot escape by any power of our own.

That the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the Law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Therefore the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

The Apostle is not speaking of a schoolmaster as we understand that word, but of the slave or servant who took the boys to school, watched over them in school and out, and even used the rod if occasion demanded. The Law whipped us to Christ and taught us that we could not be saved except by Christ.

26. *For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*

The Fatherhood of God is common to all believers— but there is no universal fatherhood, as many teach it in these days.

27-28. *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Yet some foolish people still talk about our Jewish origin! What would that matter even if it were true? “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free.” All these distinctions are done away with and Christ is All—and believers, whether Jews or Gentiles—“are all one in Christ Jesus.”

29. *And if you are Christ’s, then are you Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

So that all the blessings which God promised to Abraham belong to you who are believers in Christ! And you may take them and rejoice in them! But if you are without faith in Christ, then are you without the one essential thing which gives you an interest in the Covenant of grace.

Galatians 4

1-5. *Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differs nothing from a servant, though he is lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: but when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

Like little children, the Jewish believers were under the Law. They observed this ceremony and that, just as children, though they may be heirs to vast estates, yet, while they are in their minority, are under tutors and governors. But now in Christ we have come of age and we have done with those schoolbooks and that tutorship, and we have received the adoption of sons! Now we have joy and peace in believing. We have begun to enter into our possession. We already have the earnest of it and, by-and-by, we shall receive the fullness of the inheritance of the saints in the Light of God.

6. *And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*

While the Jewish believers, like children, were under the Law, they did not have such direct access to the Father as we have. They could not enter into such close fellowship with God as we now can. We who are the sons of God, really born into His family, feel within us a something that makes us call God, “Father,” not only in prayer, saying, “Our Father, which are in Heaven,” but, inwardly, when we are not in the attitude of prayer, our hearts keep on crying, “Father, Father.” The Jew may say, “Abba,” and the word is very sweet. But we cry, “Father,” and it means the same thing.

7. *Therefore you are no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

All God's sons are, in a certain sense, His servants, but there is a sense in which servants are not sons. We, therefore, are not like those servants who have no relationship to their master and no share in his possessions—we are sons. Whatever service we render, we are still sons, and we have a share in all that our Father has. We are heirs, "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ." Are you living up to your privileges? Are we, any of us, fully realizing what this heirship means? Do we not often live as if we were only servants toiling for hire? Do we not tremble at God as if we were His slaves rather than His children? Let us remember that we are God's sons and daughters, His heirs, and let us come close to Him. Let us take possession of the blessed inheritance which He has provided for us.

8-11. *Therefore, then, when you knew not God, you did service unto them which by nature are not gods. But now, after that you have known God, or rather are known of God, why turn you, again, to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain.*

Among the heathen, there were many "lucky" and, "unlucky" days—sacred days and days in which they indulged in sensual excess. They had even "holy" months and, "unholy" months. Now, all that kind of thing is done away with in the case of a Christian—he is set free from such weak and beggarly superstitions! Among the Jews there were certain sacred festivals—times that were more notable than other seasons—but they, also, were done away with in Christ. We observe the Christian Sabbath, but beyond that, to the true Believer, there should be no special observance of days, months and years. All that is a return to "the weak and beggarly elements" from which Christ has delivered us. That bondage is all ended, now, but there are some who still "observe days, and months, and times, and years." And Paul says to them, "I am afraid for you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." Every day is holy, every year is holy to a holy man! And every place is holy, too, to the man who brings a holy heart into it.

12. *Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as you are: you have not injured me at all.*

"Be perfectly at home with me, for I am so with you. Though you Galatians have treated me very badly, yet you have not really injured me and I freely overlook your ill manners toward me." He had told them the Gospel, and other teachers had come in and alienated their affections. He says, "Now I am just the same to you as ever I was. I wish you would have the same love to me."

13-15. *You know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the Gospel unto you at the first. And my trial which was in my flesh you despised not, nor rejected, but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is, then, the blessedness you spoke of? for I bear you record, that if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me.*

The Apostle remembers how they received him at first. His Gospel was, to them, like life from the dead and though he was full of infirmities—perhaps had weak eyes—perhaps had a stammering tongue— perhaps was, at that time, very much depressed in spirit—yet, he says, "You received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. You loved me so much that, if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me."

16. *Have I, therefore, become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*

Ah, there are many who have incurred enmity through speaking the Gospel very plainly, for the natural tendency of man is towards ceremony, towards some form of legal righteousness—he must have something aesthetic, something that delights his sensuous nature, something that he can see and hear, to mix up that with the simplicity of faith—and Paul was as clear as noonday against everything of that kind, and so the Galatians, at last, were angry with him. Well, he could not help that, but it did grieve him.

There come times, with all God's servants, when certain people proclaim something fresh and new in doctrine—and then the old messenger of God who was blessed to them, comes to be despised. I have lived long enough to see

dozens of very fine fancies started, but they have all come to nothing. I daresay I shall see a dozen more and they will all come to nothing. But here I stand—I am not led astray either by novelties of excitement or novelties of doctrine. The things which I preached at the first, I still preach, and so I shall continue, as God shall help me. But I know, in some little measure, what the Apostle meant when he said, “Have I, therefore, become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”

17. *They zealously affect you, but not well; yes, they would exclude you, that you might affect them.*

They would, if they could, turn you out of our love that you might run after them. These false teachers would shut us out of your hearts that your hearts might go after them.

18-20. *But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.*

The point of doubt was that they had been led astray by legal teachers—they had been made to believe that, after all, there was something in outward ceremonies, something in the works of the Law and so they had come under bondage again. So the Apostle says—

21. *Tell me, you that desire to be under the Law, do you not hear the Law?*

Will you not listen to what the Law, itself, teaches? Here is a little bit from one of its first books, the book of Genesis.

22-23. *For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh,*

by Abraham's own strength—

24. *But he of the free woman was by promise.*

Born when Abraham and his wife were past age—born by the power of God's Spirit, according to promise.

Which things are an allegory: for these are the two Covenants: the one from the mount Sinai which genders to bondage, which is Hagar.

It is the strength of the flesh which leads to bondage.

25. *For this Hagar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is sin bondage with her children.*

It is old Judaism coming from Sinai, "This do, and you shall live," and all the children that are born under it are children of nature—they are not the children of promise.

26. *But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.*

This is Sarah, and they that believe are the Isaac-children, the children of holy laughter, born according to the power of God. We are born of the free woman, not of the bondwoman—not born of the Covenant of Works and in the strength of the creature—but born of the Covenant of Grace, in the power of God, according to promise.

27, 28. *For it is written, Rejoice, you barren that bear not; break forth and cry, you that travail not: for the desolate has many more children than she which has an husband.*

Now we, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. If we are God's children, it is not by our own strength, or by the strength of the flesh in any measure or degree —it is by the Grace of God and the promise of God—that we are what we are.

29. *But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.*

The child of Hagar could not stand the child of Sarah, and they that seek salvation by the works of the Law, and by outward ceremonies, cannot endure the children of faith.

30, 31. *Nevertheless what says the Scripture?*

Make a compromise, and be friends? Let Isaac and Ishmael live in the same house and lie in the same bed? No!

Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.

So then, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

Galatians 5

Remember that the Epistle to the Galatians is one in which Paul, with especial clearness, proves the doctrine of justification by faith alone. So much is this the case that the famous Commentary of Martin Luther upon this Epistle is, perhaps, the strongest work extant upon the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

But that doctrine was never intended to be separated from the Scriptural teaching concerning the fruit of faith, namely, good works and, therefore, we find, in the close of this very epistle, the strongest possible declaration that if men live in sin, they will reap the result of sin—and that only if, by grace, they are brought to walk in holiness, will they win the rewards of grace.

1. *Stand fast therefore in the liberty which Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*

God grant us grace to keep to grace! God grant us faith enough to live by faith, even to the end, as the freeborn children of God, for His name's sake! Amen.

2-4. *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ had made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I, Paul, say unto you, that if you are circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole Law.*

Christ is become of no effect unto you whoever of you are justified by the Law; you are fallen from Grace. If you mean to have anything to do with salvation by works, get you gone—you are the children of the bondwoman!

5. *For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by*

faith.

We dare not hope to be acceptable with God because of anything good that is in us by nature, or may be infused into us by grace. We are accepted in the Beloved and apart from Him we look not to be found acceptable. Even what the Holy Spirit works with us does not furnish us with any merit which we can plead, for it is a gift of grace, and no part of our justifying righteousness. We rest upon Jesus Christ crucified and not upon our faith, our repentance, our prayers, our conquests of sin, our likeness to Christ! Right away from anything that comes from us or to us we look to Jesus, who is all our salvation, the Alpha and Omega, the Author and the Finisher of faith.

6. *For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision avails for anything, nor uncircumcision,*

The Savior had been pleased to institute other ordinances which better set forth the spiritual Truth which He came to reveal, and circumcision, therefore, having no more any spiritual teaching in it, became a dead thing and the Apostle says that it avails nothing. Of course, it was, in Paul's day, the outward mark of a firm believer in Judaism. The man who still held to the old faith was not to be led away by the innovations, as he supposed them to be, of Jesus of Nazareth, but still held that it was essential, first and foremost, that the seed of Israel should bear in the flesh the ordained mark. But the Apostle said that "circumcision avails nothing." He put it on to the side. But what is remarkable, as showing the force of the Apostle's meaning, is that he should have added, "Nor uncircumcision." "No," says the Apostle, "it makes no difference! You who are circumcised get no good by it and you who are uncircumcised get no good—neither the one nor the other is of any good to you."

but faith which works by love.

When faith has anything to do, she walks to the field with Love at her side. The two divine graces are inseparable. Like Mary and Martha, they are sisters and abide in one house. Faith, like Mary, sits at Jesus' feet and hears His Words and then Love diligently goes about the house and rejoices to honor the Divine Lord. This happens by a necessity of faith's own nature. The moment a man believes

in Jesus Christ, he loves Him as a matter of course. It is possible to trust in another person and not love him, but from the peculiar circumstances of the case, our Lord, having loved us and given Himself for us out of the infinite charity of His heart, we are compelled to love Him the moment we repose upon Him.

7. *You were running well; who hindered you that you should not obey the truth?*

"You Galatians seemed to receive the Gospel very readily and to be very earnest in obeying it. What has caused you to turn aside to the old legal righteousness? You are very changeable, very fickle. You seemed very energetic in running the Christian race—whatever has got in your way? 'Who did hinder you?' Somebody or other must have done so."

8. *This persuasion comes not from Him that calls you.*

"It does not come from God. He called you to faith in His dear Son and to all those virtues and Graces which naturally spring from the root of faith. Somebody else has called you aside, some false shepherd who is but a wolf in sheep's clothing—and who would destroy you if he could."

9. *A little leaven leavens the whole lump.*

One false doctrine very soon sours all your belief—the whole lump is leavened with it. If you have a wrong ground of confidence, you are altogether wrong.

10. *I have confidence in you through the Lord, that you will be none otherwise minded: but he that troubles you shall bear His judgment, whoever he is.*

Depend upon it, every man who troubles a Church with false doctrine is amenable to the High Court above! And, sooner or later, he may expect even a temporal judgment here below.

11. *And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offense of the Cross ceased.*

"The offense of the Cross" is that it sets up faith as the Infinite merit of Christ's atonement and knocks down all confidence in outward ritual and ceremonies. Paul says that if he had preached the flesh-pleasing doctrines of men, he would not have been persecuted—and the fact that he was persecuted was a proof that he was standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made him free!

12. *I would they were even cut themselves off which trouble you.*

Excommunicated and put out of the Church? No, it would be better if they were even dead rather than that they should live to spread such evil in a Christian Church! Sometimes when we think of the interests of immortal souls, we are apt to grow indignant, and rightly so, towards willfully false teachers!

13. *For, brethren, you have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love, serve one another.*

Do not turn your liberty into license. The Apostle, in this Epistle, had began urging the Christians of Galatia to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free, and never to be, again, entangled with the yoke of legal bondage. He warned them against that error into which many have fallen. But you know that it is often our tendency, if we escape from one error, to rush into another. So the Apostle guards these Christian against that Antinomian spirit which teaches us that freedom from the law allows indulgence in sin—"Use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love, serve one another."

14. *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this—You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

The condensation of the whole Law of God is contained in that one word, "love." In the First Table we are taught to love God. And the Commandments of the Second Table teach us to love our neighbor. Oh, if that "one word" were so engraved on our hearts as to influence all our lives, what blessed lives of love to

God and love to men we should lead!

15. *But if you bite and devour one another, take heed that you be not consumed one of another.*

Finding fault, slandering, injuring, bearing malice and so on—"If you bite and devour one another." When dogs and wolves bite one another, it is according to their nature, but it is indeed bad when sheep take to biting one another. If I must be bitten at all, let me be bitten by a dog rather than by a sheep. That is to say, the wounds inflicted by the godly are far more painful to bear and last much longer than those caused by wicked men. Besides, we can say with the Psalmist, "It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it." It is natural that the serpent's seed should nibble at our heel and seek to do us injury, but when the bite comes from a Brother—from a child of God—then it is peculiarly painful. Well might the Apostle write, "If you bite and devour one another, take heed that you be not consumed one of another." I have lived long enough to see churches absolutely destroyed, not by any external attacks, but by internal contention.

16. *This I say then, walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*

If your life is guided by the Spirit of God—if you are spiritual men and women, and your actions are worked in the power of the Spirit, "you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." Walk under the Spirit's power, following His guidance. The Spirit never leads a man into sin. He never conducts him into self-indulgence and excess.

17. *For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.*

They will never agree—these two powers are always contrary, one to the other. If you think that you can help God by getting angry, you make a great mistake. You cannot fight God's battles with the devil's weapons. It is not possible that the power of the flesh should help the power of the Spirit!

And these are contrary, the one to the other so that you cannot do the things that you would.

How often that is the case! You would be perfect, but, "you cannot do the things that you would." We would, if possible, escape from every evil thought—we would not even hear of anything sinful if we could help it.

18. *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*

The Law of God is always to you the blessed rule by which you judge your conduct, but it is not a law of condemnation to you—neither are you seeking salvation by it.

19-21. *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, reveling, and such like.*

A black catalog, but sin is very prolific. We must take care that we avoid each one of these works of the flesh, or else we shall give no proof that we are led by the Spirit of God and possess the Grace of God. The list is always too long to be completed! We are obliged to sum up with a kind of et cetera—"and such like."

Of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.

Read over the list. Put the question to conscience, "Am I guilty of such things?" If so, do not suppose that the holding of orthodox Doctrine will save you, or that any kind of religious ceremony will save you! You must be delivered from these lusts of the flesh—these deeds of the flesh—or you cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. A very solemn, searching, sweeping declaration! Let each man judge himself by this test!

Paul never said, nor ever thought of saying, that a man might live in sin that grace might abound. No, no—these evil things must be given up! Christ has

come to save us from every evil work. And this is the salvation that we preach—not simply salvation from hell, but salvation from sin—which is the very fire that has kindled the infernal flame. But how different from all this evil is the fruit of the Spirit!

22, 23. *But the fruit of the spirit is love.*

Universal love, first, to God. Next, to His people and, then, to all mankind. Have we that fruit of the Spirit? If so, it will make us of a very amiable disposition. It will dethrone selfishness and set up holy affections within our heart.

joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.

Joy and peace seem to blossom and ripen out of love. Long-suffering, too, is part of the fruit of the Spirit. You will be hourly tried, but the Spirit of God will give you patience to suffer long and to endure much. You will also have gentleness. Some people are very hard, stern, severe, quick-tempered, passionate—but the true follower of Christ will be gentle and tender, even as He was.

What a wonderful cluster of the grapes of Eshcol we have here! “The fruit of the Spirit”—as if all this were but one, after all—many luscious berries forming one great cluster. Oh, that all these things may be in us and abound, that we may be neither barren nor unfruitful! But if we do not have them—if they are not found in us—then we have not the Spirit, for if we had the Spirit, we would bear the fruit of the Spirit.

Against such there is no law.

Surely, neither human nor Divine! These are things which are commended on all hands.

24. *And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.*

It is not yet dead, but it is crucified. It hangs up on the cross, straining to break away from the iron hold, but it cannot, for it is doomed to die. A man who is crucified cannot get down from the cross to do what he wills and, oh, it is a great blessing to have our sinful self thus nailed up! Ah, sir, you may struggle, but you cannot get down! You may strive and cry, but your hands and feet are nailed—you cannot go into active, actual sin. The Lord grant that the nails may hold very fast, that none of the struggling of our old nature may be able to pull out those nails that have fastened it up to the cross!

25. *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

If that is our real life, let it also be our course of action.

26. *Let us not be desirous of vainglory,*

Do Christian people need to be talked to like this? Yes, they do, for the best of men are but men at their best—and the godliest saint is liable to fall into the foulest sin unless the grace of God prevents it. Oh, that we could expel from the Church of Christ all vain-glorying, all provoking of one another and all envying of one another! How often, if one Christian brother does a little more than his fellow workers, they begin to find fault with him! And if one is blessed with greater success than others are, how frequently that success is disparaged and spoken of slightingly! This spirit of envy is, more or less, in all of us, and though, perhaps, we are not exhibiting it just now, it only needs a suitable opportunity for its display and it would be manifested. No man here has any idea of how bad he really is. You do not know how good the Grace of God can make you, nor how bad you are by nature, nor how bad you might become if that nature were left to itself!

provoking one another, envying one another.

If each would strive to do the greatest deeds of love and each were willing to take the lowest place, then this evil would never again be known.

Galatians 6

1. *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.*

When Christians fall into a fault, it is on account of their traveling slowly on the road to Heaven. Hence the expression, “If he is overtaken with a fault.” He would not have been overtaken if he had been traveling faster! If his heart had been quick in the ways of the Lord, he would have outstripped the temptation. Now, when a brother falls into sin, it is too often the habit to push him down—to cast him out and forget him. But spiritually-minded persons must not do so. We must seek the restoration of the brother or sister. Is there not more joy over the sheep that was lost than over those that went not astray? Have we not the best reason to deal tenderly with wanderers, since we cannot tell that we may not need the same generous offices for ourselves? “Considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” He seems to take it for granted that we probably would, if we were tempted as the other Brother was.

2. *Bear you one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

Help each other. If you have a light load, take a part of somebody else’s. If you see that they have more to do than they can accomplish, take a share of their labor. If they have a heavier burden than they can bear, try to put your shoulder beneath their load and so lighten it for them.

3. *For if a man thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

Mainly deceives himself. Other people generally find it out. It is no use

estimating your fortune at so many millions, for it will not make it so! And it is of no use estimating yourself at a very high price, because it does not make it so. “He deceives himself.”

4, 5. *But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself, alone, and not in another For every man shall bear his own burden.*

There are burdens of care and sorrow which we can help others to bear, but the burdens of responsibility each man must carry for himself. The load of service for the Master must be carried personally. And let us be glad to shoulder it, since Christ has done so much for us. And how else can we express gratitude but by serving Him?

6. *Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teaches in all good things.*

Paul puts that in connection with the support of those who are teachers of the Truth. And I have sometimes thought that in certain Churches where God’s ministers have starved, it was not very surprising that the people should starve, too. They thought so little about the pastor that they left him in need, so it was not strange that, as they sowed little, they reaped little. One of these misers said that his religion did not cost him more than a shilling a year—and somebody replied that he thought it was a shilling wasted on a bad thing, for his poor religion was not worth even that small amount!

7. *Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.*

That is true under the Gospel as well as under the Law.

8. *For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.*

He shall reap what flesh turns to in due time—“he shall of the flesh reap corruption.” What is the end of flesh? The fairest flesh that ever was molded

from the most beauteous form ends in corruption! And if we live for the flesh, and sow to it, we shall reap “corruption.”

But he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

He shall reap what the Spirit really is and what the Spirit really generates—“life everlasting.” Of course if a man sows tares, he reaps tares. If he sows wheat, he reaps wheat. If we sow to the flesh, we reap corruption. If we sow to the Spirit, we shall “reap life everlasting.”

9. *And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, it we faint not.*

It is a pity to faint just when the time is coming to reap, so, sow on, sow on!

10. *As we have, therefore, opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*

Extend your love, your charity to all mankind. But let the center of that circle be in the home where God has placed you—in the home of His people—“especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” They have a first claim upon us. They are nearest of kin. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let them have a Benjamin’s portion!

11. *You see how large a letter I have written unto you with my own hand.*

Paul did not often write his own Epistles. It is thought that he had a defect of the eyes. He generally employed a secretary. When he did write, he wrote generally in great capitals. I suppose that is what he meant. “You see how emphatic my writing is—what great characters I have made in writing to you.” Or he may have meant that for a letter, written by him, this was a lengthy one.

12, 13. *As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they*

constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the Cross of Christ.

For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the Law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.' 'See," they say, "these Gentiles. We have converted them and we have got them circumcised. Is not that a wonderful thing?" No, not at all, for he says—

14. *But God foretold that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*

"I have ceased to care," says Paul, "about glorying in men and making other people glory in my converts. The world is dead to me, and I to it."

15-17. *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*

I have the marks of the whips upon my body. I am the branded slave of Jesus Christ. There is no getting the marks out of me. I cannot run away. I cannot deny that He is my Master and my Owner! "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

18. *Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit Amen.*

And that is our benediction to you. The Lord fulfill it to each one of you!

EPHESIANS

Ephesians 1

In this chapter we see what Paul, writing under the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has to say about the possessions and privileges of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. *Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,*

He was not made an Apostle by man, neither did he take the office upon himself, but he was made an Apostle by the will of God.

to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

The saints in Ephesus, the saints where they cried, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians,” had to bear an earnest witness against idolatry. And, dear Friends, today saints in London will not have a very easy time of it if they are faithful to their Lord, for there is much to protest against in this evil generation! But as there were holy ones in Ephesus, God grant that there may be many such in London!

2. *Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul would have us peaceful, restful, quiet. That peace must be based upon Divine grace—he does not pray that we may have peace apart from grace, but, “Grace be to you, and peace.” This is a benediction for you as well as for the saints at Ephesus! It is for all “the faithful in Christ Jesus.” May you all have grace without measure and may you all have “the peace of God, which passes all understanding,” to “keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”! Grace and peace are both to be had by believing in Jesus.

3. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*

It is right that we should bless God as He has so richly blessed us. Blessed be the Heavenly Father who has so abundantly blessed His children. How has He blessed us? “With all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (or, things) in Christ.”

4. *According as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.*

The high mystery of Election is taught in the Word of God, but some are afraid to speak of it. Not so our Apostle! He brings it out very clearly and distinctly, and so should we, only taking care to keep it in the proportion of other Doctrines. That is the commencement of all the blessing, God’s electing love. This is the Fountain from which the Living Waters flow. There would have been no stream of blessing to us at all if it had not been for this first primeval choice of us by God, even as Jesus said to His disciples, “You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.”

4. *That we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.*

Here is the blessing of sanctification—we are chosen that we may be made holy. To what nobler end could we have been elected? Is not this the very highest of our heart’s desires—“that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love”?

5. *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.*

You hear much about the free will of man. Hear a little about the free will of God! You would think, from the talk of some, that God was man’s debtor and must do according to the will of man. But it is not so. He is a Sovereign, and gives His grace to whom He chooses, and He would have us know that it is according to the good pleasure of His will.

6. *To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He has made us accepted in the Beloved.*

Are there four words in any language which contain choicer meaning than these, “Accepted in the Beloved”? Oh, if you can say that, if you can feel it to be true, you are among the happiest of men and women! “Accepted in the Beloved.” You can never be accepted apart from Christ, the Father’s best Beloved. But there is merit enough in Him to overflow and cover all our sins, and we are accepted in the Beloved. Oh, the joy of being Beloved, adopted, accepted by God the Father because of His beloved Son! Now comes something more.

7. *In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*

Redemption from destruction, the forgiveness of our sins—we have all this through “the riches of His grace.” Notice how the Apostle keeps on insisting that we have everything in Christ. He says, times out of number, “in Him,” “in Christ.” We have redemption. We are free. We are no longer under bonds. What is the price? “Through His blood.” What is the result? “Forgiveness of sins.” What is the measure of our liberty? “According to the riches of His grace.”

8. *Wherein He has abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.*

Not drowning us with floods of His grace, but handing it out to us as we are able to take it. The riches of His grace we have, but He uses wisdom and prudence, teaching us little by little as we are able to bear it, and raising us up by degrees from one stage of grace to another, according as our poor frames can endure the joy!

9. 10. *Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He has purposed in Himself: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him.*

There are things in Christ in Heaven. There are things in Christ on earth. But all the things in Christ shall be gathered together. All the redeemed shall come as one great host to bow before the Throne of the Infinite Majesty.

11. *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance.*

We have got the inheritance. Even now we have entered upon possession of the Kingdom of grace.

11, 12. *Being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will; That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

The first saints led the way in the front of the army, and they are to the praise of God's Glory to this day. We thank God for the Apostles and martyrs who went before us. We will follow them as they followed Christ.

13. *In whom you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation: in whom also after that you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.*

After faith, the Holy Spirit is given to dwell in the soul. That is the seal. It is not that the Holy Spirit brings a seal with Him. He is the Seal. Where He dwells, He is the seal of God's love to that man.

14. *Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory.*

The Holy Spirit is first, the seal, and next, the earnest. We all know what an earnest is. It is different from a pledge. A pledge is given and then it is taken back again when the stipulation is carried out. But an earnest is part of what is to be ultimately received. The man who receives an earnest of his wage gets a few shillings, say, on Thursday, instead of taking all on Saturday. He never returns that. It is a part of his wages. And so the Holy Spirit is a part of him. When we have got Him, we have got Christ—

"You are the earnest of His love,
The pledge of joys to come;
And Your soft wings, Celestial Dove,
Shall safely convey me home."

There is no end to the blessing which God gives to His chosen. He is always blessing us with blessings upon blessings, grace upon grace, and then there will be Glory to crown it all. Blessed be His holy name forever and ever!

15, 16. *Therefore I, also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.*

Is that the way that we pray? Do we make mention of people in our prayers? It is well to do so! It is a good plan to keep a list of persons for whom we ought to pray and to put it before us when we draw near to God, and go over the names. I know one man of God who has kept a debtor and creditor list with God for many years. He puts his requests down in the book, and when they are answered he puts that down, and if they are not answered, he repeats them. It is a very wonderful book. I think that he told me that there is a name down there of a person for whom he has prayed, who is not converted yet, and that out of several for whom he began to pray, he is the only one who is not converted—and that he is the only one that is alive! The others were brought to Christ and died in the faith, but he, not yet brought to Christ, still lives—and my friend prays on with as great a confidence of the conversion of that man as I have that Christmas will come in due time! I wish that we did business with God in some such fashion as that, but our prayers are shadowy, unreal. God teach us how to pray!

17-21. *That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling,*

You see he gave thanks to God for their faith and for their love. But there are three Divine sisters that must never be separated—faith, hope, and love, and so the Apostle prays, "that you may know what is the hope of His calling."

and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His right hand in the heavenly places. Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

See how high Christ is raised! The same power that brought Christ from the dead and set Him on high, works in the salvation of every believer! Nothing less than Omnipotence can save a soul—and Omnipotence at its very best in the glorification of Christ is none too great for the salvation of a sinner!

22, 23. *And has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all-in-all.*

How Paul glows as he writes on this great theme! He waxes warm, and rises to an enthusiasm of eloquence. We could not stop to explain his words; that were to spoil their mystic poetry. Oh, to have a heart that can glorify Christ as Paul did! Truly, if we know ourselves to be one with Christ, and know the privileges which come to us through that blessed gate, we may indeed extol him with all our heart and soul.

Ephesians 2

1. *And you has He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.*

These were your grave clothes. You were wrapped up in them. No, this was your tomb! You were shut up in it, as in a great stone coffin—"Dead in trespasses and sins."

2. *Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.*

You were once no better than the workshop of the devil. He is the spirit that works in the children of disobedience, as the blacksmith works in his forge. When you hear foul language, when you see bad actions, these are the sparks coming out of the chimney that let you know who is at work within, down below. What a dreadful thing it is—a man dead to all that is good, but alive through the indwelling of the devil that is within him! "The spirit that now works in the children of disobedience."

3. *Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*

Not children of God, even as some profanely assert when they talk about the universal fatherhood of God. You were children of wrath, even as others. And the best of men were no better than others by nature. They were as dead, as much under the influence of Satan, as much under the influence of the lusts of the flesh as others are who are left where they are. It is only Sovereign grace that makes us to differ. "Were by nature," not by error—by nature! Not by a mistake,

not by a few actions, but by nature, the children of wrath, even as others! See what you used to be? Let this make you humble. See what you would have been? Let this make you grateful. “You has He quickened.” He has put life into you. He has made you quit your graves. He has made you come from under the dominion of Satan and the devices of your own heart. Will you not bless His name tonight?

4, 5. *But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together with Christ.*

Wonder! The life that quickens. Christ quickens all the members of His mystical body, and this has come to us through the riches of God’s mercy. Whatever God has, He has in abundance, but of His mercy we read that He has riches of it—and truly all those riches of mercy He has shown in our case. We cannot but have riches of gratitude for such riches of mercy!

By grace you are saved.

See, Paul puts that in a parenthesis. It was not necessary to the sense, but he knew that there would come a time when men would not like this Doctrine, so he puts it in, “By grace are you saved.” They cannot bear it and, therefore, they shall have it. They shall have it when the sense does not seem to demand it. To make it quite clear, he will insert it. “By grace you are saved.”

6. *And has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*

We are not only raised from the dead with Christ, but we are spiritually raised into the heavenly places with Him. It is a great thing when a man learns to look up from earth to Heaven. It is a greater thing when he learns to look down from Heaven upon earth—to have you sitting at the right hand of God, and then to look down on all the things of this present life as far below you!

7. *That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*

We are to be a show, an exhibition, in which God will exhibit the riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Angels will count it a high joy to study the life of a regenerate man, to see him rise from death in sin to the Glory of God in Christ Jesus! What is so precious in God's esteem ought to continually excite our praise.

8, 9. *For by grace are you saved*

There it is again! Paul rings that silver bell in the deaf ears of men. "By grace are you saved."

through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.

We would be sure to boast if we could. We are a boasting people! Man is a poor mass of flesh, and he is largely given to the corruption of pride. He will boast if he can.

10. For we are His workmanship. If there is any good thing in us, He put it there. It is not for us to boast. It is for Him to boast if He pleases.

10-12. *Created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.*

Therefore remember—Oh, that is a good word for us, "Remember." We are so apt to forget. "Remember"—

That you, being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by those who are called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time you were without Christ.

Had you to do with Christ? The Jews call you uncircumcised dogs! What had you to do with the Messiah? Was not the Messiah for God's Israel? You did not belong to Israel.

12, 13 *Being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise,*

The Covenant was in Isaac. You are not the children of Isaac. You are not descended from Abraham. You were strangers from the Covenants of promise.

having no hope.

Either here or hereafter.

and without God in the world.But now

—Oh, what a contrast—

in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off, are made near by the blood of Christ.

You are brought near to Israel! You are brought still nearer to Israel's God! Now you are not aliens. Yon are not strangers from the Covenant You have a hope, you have a God!

14, 15. *For He is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us. Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of two, one new man, so making peace.*

There is no circumcision and uncircumcision now, for that is done away with. There is now no Israel according to the flesh, and Gentiles who are not of God, for there is a spiritual Israel, to which we belong, as well as those of Abraham's race. He has swept out of the way all the ordinances which divided us, and we are now one in Him!

16, 17. *And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the*

cross, having slain the enmity thereby. And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were near.

To the Gentile and to the Jew, to the atrociously wicked, and to those who were religious after a fashion—He has brought them both in by the Cross.

18. *For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

Here you have the Trinity in a single line of Scripture, and it needs the Trinity to make an acceptable prayer! Through Him, (that is, Christ), we have access by one Spirit unto the Father, and now, today, the Church of God is one in prayer, whether Jew or Gentile. We come to God by the same Mediator, helped by the same Spirit. We have answers of peace from the same Father!

19. *Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God.*

There are many here whom we do not know. We have not seen their faces before, but if they are in Christ and we are in Christ, we are very near of kin! There is an old saying that blood is thicker than water, and depend upon it that when there is the blood of Christ sprinkled upon us, it makes very near kinship! When we are bought with the same price, quickened by the same life, and are on the way to the same Heaven, we are very near of kin! We are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and all the household of God! They make a great fuss when they give a man the key of the City of London. There is a fine gold box to put it in. You have got the key of the New Jerusalem and your faith, like a golden box, holds the deeds of your citizenship. Take care of them and rejoice in them!

20, 21. *And are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ, Himself, being the chief cornerstone: in whom all the building fitly framed together grows unto an holy temple in the Lord.*

The Church is a framed house. It has an Architect. Some seem to think that it is a load of bricks. They have no church officers. There are none set apart to this work, and none to the other. It seems to be just a heap of stones thrown down any way. But a true Church is, by the Spirit of God, a building fitly framed together. One is a door, another is a window. One lies low and hidden in the foundation. Another may have a more prominent position in the wall. And it should be so with us—that we should each have a place that God has appointed him, and keep to that place. Lord, build up Your Church upon earth at this time!

22. *In whom you also are built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

We are not built to stand like a carcass. It is a ghastly sight to see houses in London nearly finished, but never occupied—but it is the glory of the Church of God that it is inhabited! It is a habitation of God through the Spirit. Holy Spirit, dwell more evidently in Your Church! Keep open house for all poor sinners who come to Christ and glorify God!

Ephesians 3

1. *For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles.*

Paul thought very lovingly of his congregation. He counted it a great grace that he was permitted to preach among the Gentiles. Peter had a much more respectable sphere, for he was the Apostle of the Circumcision and preached to the ancient aristocratic race of the Hebrews. But Paul was sent to preach to the Gentile dogs who were despised by the Jews as uncircumcised and unclean. Our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, gave the Gentiles a sad character, for when speaking of worldly things He said, "After all these things do the Gentiles seek," as if they were utterly gross and carnal and entirely besotted with groveling pursuits. Paul, however, rejoiced to preach to these "worldly-minded Gentiles." He was glad to bring the outcasts to Jesus! They were such an ignorant crew, these Gentiles, ignorant of the true God and eternal life. Though there were some of them wise in their own conceits, yet were they sunk in spiritual ignorance. There were the Greeks, proud of their learned folly. The Romans, boasting of brute force and despising a merely spiritual kingdom. The Scythians, barbarous and uncouth. And the bondsmen, sunk in vice and degradation. But he who was sent to labor among them preferred them to any other audience! Paul thanked God for his congregation, ignorant as they were.

2-5 *If you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you.How by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote before in few words,whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ).Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*

The sublime plan of the Gospel of the grace of God is so entirely beyond the

compass of our natural faculties that we could never, by searching, have found it out. For many an age the light did not shine upon heathen lands. One spot, alone, upon all the earth received the genial beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Vast continents, thickly populated, full of life, bustle and enterprise, lay spread out as a moral waste, barren and neglected. But little revelation of God had found its way among the teeming multitudes of the population. To them the dispensation of the grace of God had not been proclaimed. The mystery of Christ was not as yet made known unto the sons of men. The Israelites had a monopoly of Covenant privileges.

6. *That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.*

But now in these latter days, how wondrously are the tables turned! The branches of the wild olive have been grafted in "that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel." Thus the Lord has taken unto Himself a numerous seed once ignored by Israel, "which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." Not after the lineage of the flesh, but according to the nobler lineage of faith, the same are the children of Abraham—and with faithful Abraham do they inherit the Covenant mercy of God. This day the barren woman keeps house and is the joyful mother of many children. The Gentile Church has her stones of sapphire—God is in the midst of her to make her glad!

7. *Of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.*

This is a wonderful expression, "made a minister." The true minister is of God's making! A man-made minister must be a poor creature, but a God-made minister will prove his calling.

8. *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints,*

Because there were no adjectives in correct language which could express Paul's opinion of himself, he did violence to language and said that he was "less than

the least of all saints." He had been, before, a persecutor and injurious and, though God had forgiven him, he had never forgiven himself. And when he remembered his share in the sufferings and martyrdom of the saints, he felt that though now numbered among them, he could only dare to sit in the lowest place.

is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Paul thought most of all, of his Subject. That he had to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ was his highest bliss. The glories of Jesus, whom once he had persecuted, were his one and only theme. All he had to say was contained within the circumference of that word, Christ, and all that he aimed at was to glorify his Lord. Neither ceremonies, nor orthodoxies, nor philosophies, nor sects, nor parties did Paul labor for—he exalted only in Christ Jesus the Lord! Nor did he feel that his engrossment by one solitary Subject restricted him in his thought or speech, for he looked upon his theme as full of riches, riches altogether unsearchable! He had a deep insight into the Truth which he had to proclaim and saw within it veins of precious thought which he could never exhaust—lodes of more than golden treasure which no research could ever fully explore!

9. *And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.*

Paul here vehemently sets forth the yearnings of his heart in the exercise of his ministry.

10. *So that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.*

The "principalities and powers in heavenly places" to whom the Apostle here refers, are, no doubt, the angels. The different degrees in the hierarchy of immortal spirits, if such there is—they are all represented as intently gazing upon the wondrous fabric which God has reared. Along the aisles of that Church, along the ages of its dispensations, stand the various trophies of Divine grace and love—the jewel cases of virtues and graces which adorn the believer—the

mementoes of triumphs gotten over sin and hardness of heart and of victories achieved over temptation and trial. And as the spirits walk along these corridors full of Divine workmanship, they stand, they gaze, they admire and wonder and speed back their way to Heaven and sing more loudly than before, hallelujahs to the God whose manifold wisdom they have beheld in the Church of God below. What a scale of survey must a seraph have! Yet with all that facility of observation, it seems that the angels have some parts of the wisdom of God to learn. They have some lessons of heavenly science to study which creation cannot unfold to their view—to be ascertained and certified by them only through the transcendent work of Redemption which the Lord has carried on in His Church.Herein is manifold wisdom, that the Lord God should make so strange a creature, that He should be formed of the dust of the ground, and yet created in the image of God. A creature that should know sin, and whatever of pleasure there might be in it, and yet be restored to purity and holiness. A creature who though awhile estranged in heart, and guilty of rebelling with a high hand against his Creator, should return to its allegiance through the infinitely wise workings of God's Spirit, and from now on should remain forever the liege servant of God! And, something more, the child of God would be lifted up and exalted into a nearness of connection and intimacy of communion with the Great Father of Spirits into which no creature had ever been brought before! In that grand design, the angels must have seen much of the sublime wisdom of God, and that conspicuously through the Church.

11. *According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Long before man was created, it was in the eternal purpose that such a singular and specially favored being should be formed—and all things concerning Covenant purposes and designs were written in that book into which angels may not look. I believe that from of old, the creation and the sanctification of elect manhood was the apex of the great pyramid of the Divine Purpose, the focus of the Divine Glory, that for which all other things were made. There never was a time in which God, in the thoughts of His heart, was not familiar with man! Of old there was a Covenant of Peace on man's behalf and love everlasting dictated every line.

12. *In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith*

of him.

Those who saw Oriental monarchs were generally considered to be highly-privileged persons. There were certain ministers of State who had the right to go in and see the king whenever they chose to do so. In Christ Jesus believers have boldness and access with confidence in coming to the Throne of the heavenly grace. The way is open, and you have boldness to enter; but not without the blood of Jesus. It would be an unholy boldness which would think of drawing near to God without the blood of the great Sacrifice. We have always to plead the atonement. As without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, so without that blood there is no access to God.

13, 14. *Wherefore I desire that you do not faint at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

When the Apostle Paul was writing the most doctrinal of his Epistles, he sometimes paused in the midst of them to offer a supplication. When engaged in any holy duties, you may even refrain from praise for a moment in order to present a prayer to God. Nor would it be amiss for us, sometimes, to break the thread of a sermon, that the people might pause and join with the preacher in asking God's blessing upon the message of mercy and upon all who hear it. Certainly, my dear Friends, you will never find any time inopportune for prayer if your heart is true and your faith in full force. Paul's argument would not suffer in the least—indeed it would be all the stronger for this little interval of prayer.

15. *Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*

We meet all the saints of every age whenever we meet with God in Christ Jesus. In fellowship with Jesus you are come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the First-Born, whose names are written in Heaven, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. It is impossible to restrict our communion with the people of God by the bounds of sect, race, country, or time, for we are vitally one with them all. We are already justified and accepted in the Beloved as much as the glorified. The veil is torn for us as well as for them. The dividing

mountains of sin are overturned for us as well as for them. Sinners as we are, we have access to God by the blood of Jesus—and with joy we draw near the Throne of God! They have attained to perfection and we are following after. They see the Lord face to face, but we, also, who are pure in heart, have grace given us to see God. The atoning blood has removed the middle wall and we are one in Christ Jesus.

16. *That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.*

Remember that none of you will be able to comprehend the measurement of the love of Christ unless first of all the Holy Spirit, our Instructor, shall have baptized your spiritual powers with His sacred influences. Then you will be strengthened with might in that refined and newly created part of your being which is called the inner man, because it is your truest, most precious, most secret, most vital, most essential self. The apostle does not so much intend that they may be strengthened in their mental faculties as in their spiritual capacities, to which he refers by the term, "inner man."Our faith, for instance, must be unwavering. Our love must become fervent. Our hope must be bright. Our joy must be increased, and then, but not till then, we shall be able to comprehend the length and breadth of Divine love. We are to be strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit of God—and who can strengthen as He strengthens? When the Divine Omnipotence pours its renewing energy into our poor fainting weakness, then we grow strong, indeed!

17. *That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.*

Observe the words, "that He may dwell"—not that He may call upon you sometimes, as a casual visitor enters into a house and tarries for a night—but that He may dwell. That Christ may take up His abode in your hearts. That the Lord Jesus may become the Lord and tenant of your inmost being, never more to go out, but to dwell there, world without end. Observe, too, the words that He may dwell in your hearts—that best room of the house of manhood—not in your thoughts alone, but in your affections! Not merely have Him in your minds, but have Him in your loves.This cannot be accomplished except by faith. Faith must be strong, or love will not be fervent. Now Jesus cannot be in your heart's love except you have a firm hold of Him by your heart's faith. Therefore Paul prays

that you may always trust Christ, that you may always love Him.

17. *That you, being rooted and grounded in love.*

Having the love of Jesus in you—possessed with love to Christ—you will be practiced in the exercise of love and so will understand the love which filled the Savior. You will learn to do business upon the greater waters of the Redeemer's infinite love to His people as you sail upon the stream of your love to Him. Two expressions are used—"rooted," like a living tree which lays hold upon the soil twists itself round the rocks, and cannot be upturned. "Grounded," like a building which has been settled, as a whole, and will never show any cracks or flaws in the future through failures in the foundation. The Apostle wishes us to be rooted and grounded in love, a vital union being established between our souls and Jesus, so that we love Him because He first loved us.

18. *May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.*

Alas, to a great many religious people the love of Jesus is not a solid substantial thing at all—it is a beautiful fiction, a sentimental belief, a formal theory—but to Paul it was a real, substantial, measurable fact. He had considered it this way, and that way, and the other way. And it was evidently real to him, whatever it might be to others. No one knows the love of Christ at all if he does not know it to be real, and no one has felt it in his soul at all unless it becomes so real as to constrain him and move him into actual activity.We must realize, or make real to our hearts the love of Christ. That is just what I think the Apostle did—he made real to himself the love of his Master and Lord. It was not to him a surface theory, which might have breadth, but could not have depth—or a mere narrow statement with length, but no breadth! It was a thing as firm and solid as anything in the world.For breadth the love of Jesus is immensity, for length it is eternity, for depth it is immeasurability—and for height it is infinity. O Christian, may the Holy Spirit instruct you in these great things!

19. *And to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge,*

This is the closing clause and consummation of Paul's prayer for the Ephesian

believers. It mentions the grandest gift for which he prayed. When Jesus dwells in us, we do not merely believe in His love as a report, but we enjoy it as a fact.We have made its acquaintance—we have tasted, we have handled, we have experienced this heavenly gift. What a favor! To know the love of Christ! Do not forget that this only comes of Christ's dwelling in us and of our being rooted and grounded in love to Him.

that you might be filled with all the fulness of God.

"Filled with all the fullness of God." What can it mean?Is it to have God within you? God dwelling in your inmost spirit? It is this, but more! "Filled with God"—to hold as much of God as your nature can hold—what a thought! "Filled with God," even this is not all. "Filled with the fullness of God." The fullness of His love and grace, and power, and holiness can come to dwell in you! But this, even, is not all that the verse speaks of! It is written, "filled with all the fullness of God." What a transcendent expression! Here we have not only an indwelling God, but that God in the utmost fullness of His Godhead filling and overflowing the whole soul with His fullness!

20. *Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,*

Although our needs are, in themselves, very terrible and far greater than can be supplied by anything short of all-sufficiency, yet God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we actually need.He will not treat us as men treat a pensioner, to whom they allot barely enough to live upon and count themselves generous for doing so. He will treat us as kings and princes and do exceedingly abundantly above all that we need.Notice the Apostle's use of the word, "abundantly." He says, not only that God is able to do above what we ask or think, but "abundantly." We might say of a man, "He has given much, but he has still something left." That expression would fall sadly short if applied to the Most High! He has not only something left, but all abundance left.

according to the power that worketh in us.

We know that God can give us more than we ask or think, for He has given us

more than we have asked or thought. Our regeneration came to us before prayer, for prayer was the first sign of the new birth already given. To pray for life is not a faculty of the dead—but regeneration puts into us the living desire and the spiritual longing. The first principle of life imparted makes us long after more life.If you are a Christian you must be conscious of a power in you far too great for your mental or physical constitution to bear if it were not restrained. Do you never experience groans which cannot be uttered, deep and terrible, like the moving of an earthquake, as though everything were loosed within you with extreme heaviness, anguish and travailing in birth? These pangs and throes betray the latent God within you, cramped for room within the narrow bounds of your new created and growing spiritual nature! Have you never felt the working and striving of strong desires, fierce hunger and insatiable thirsts? Have you not felt mysterious energies working like pent-up springs within your spirit, demanding space and vent, or threatening to burst your heart?

21. *Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

The Apostle felt that he must not say, "Unto Him be glory in my soul." He wished that, but his one soul afforded far too little space and so he cried, "unto Him be glory in the Church." He calls upon all the people of God to praise the Divine name.When comes the end and He shall have delivered up the power to God, even the Father, still the everlasting song shall go up to God and the Lamb! And through the ages of ages when God shall be All in All, it shall be the bliss of every redeemed one forever and forever to say, "Unto Him be Glory, unto Him be Glory forever and ever!"

Ephesians 4

1. *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called.*

"You are called to be sons of God, you are called to be one with Christ, you are called to be kings and priests unto God—this is the highest possible vocation that anyone can have, so walk worthy of it!" O Beloved, if we walk worthy of this vocation, what holy and noble lives we shall lead! The Apostle so much desired godliness and holiness to be the characteristics of those to whom he wrote that he used a very strong term of entreaty—"I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called."

2. *With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.*

"You are not called to bully others, to be lords over God's heritage. You are called to be Christ-like, to be gentle and tender, ready to bear and to forgive all manner of wrong that may be done to you."

3. *Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Some people seem as if they endeavored to break the unity of the Spirit and to snap every sacred bond of love and Christian affection—be you not like they, but let Christ's mind be in you and with lowliness, and meekness, and long-suffering, endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4-6. *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and*

Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

If there were two lords, you might be divided into two parties. If there were two faiths, you might split up into two sections. If there were two baptisms, you might be right in having two denominations. If there were two fathers, there might be two families. If there were two indwelling spirits, there would be, and there must be, two sorts of people! But, in the true Church of Jesus Christ, there is "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

7. *But unto everyone of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*

We have not all the same form of grace and we cannot all perform the same service for the Savior. We differ very much from each other as to our abilities and as to the positions which we can occupy—and our Lord intended it to be so.

8-10. *Therefore He says, "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. (Now this, "He ascended," what is it but that He also descended, first, into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same, also, that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things).*

Paul could not help giving us this lesson by the way, that He that ascended was also He that first descended. And you may depend upon it that the man who will attain the highest honor in the Church of Christ is the man who descends—who lays aside all ambition and all desire to be honored and respected—and who is willing to be nothing. He who thus descends, shall surely ascend.

11. *And He gave some, Apostles; and some, Prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.*

Not all alike, not all Apostles or Prophets. And not all equal, for pastors may not be equal in rank with Apostles. They are not all to do the same work, for all teachers cannot prophesy, neither does a Prophet always serve as a pastor and watch over a flock. Jesus Christ gave different gifts.

12, 13. *For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*

Then, whatever spiritual gifts we have, they are not our own to use as we please —they are only entrusted to us that we may employ them to help our fellow Christians. We are one with Christ, and we are one with each other and, therefore, we must not look, every man upon his own things, but also upon the things of others! And it should be a question of the first importance to every Christian, "How can I best utilize myself for the benefit of the rest of the members of the Church?" Do not ask, "How can I benefit myself?" but let your enquiry be, "How can I be most profitable to my fellow Christians?"

I have heard some professors say of a sermon that they could not feed under it—the discourse was very likely to be useful to the unconverted, but they could not stand it because they could not feed under it. Their idea seems to be that preaching must always be a spoon used for feeding them—but it is not so! The Word of God contains much spiritual nutriment specially suitable for the lambs of the flock. These men who are strong, need meat, so they say that they do not enjoy what they hear, it is of no use to them. But are the babies in Christ's family never to be fed? Does not humanity itself teach us that, first of all, the weakest and feeblest should be cared for? Oh, for grace to be unselfish! There is such a thing as Christian selfishness and, of all evil things in the world, it is the most unchristian! When the first and last concern of a man is his own salvation, his own comfort, his own advancement, his own edification and nothing besides, he needs to be saved from such a selfish spirit as that!

14-16. *That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, makes increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

Every part of the body has its own special function. There are some secret vessels of which as yet the physiologists know very little. What may be the particular use of them has not yet been ascertained, but depend upon it, God has created no part of our body in vain and, in like manner, in the mystical body of Christ, every Christian has his own office, his own work, something that he can do that nobody else can do! And our great objective should be to find out what that work is and to give our whole strength to it, for the nourishing of the entire body of Christ.

17-19. *This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling.*

That is a terrible expression, “past feeling.”

19-25. *Have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ; if indeed you have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus that you put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man, which God created in righteousness and true holiness.*

Therefore putting away lying, as a rotten, worn-out garment that you could not bear to wear.

26. *Speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members, one of another.*

Then, why should we lie, one to another? Should one hand try to deceive the other hand? Should the eye mislead the foot? Surely, the union of one member with all the other members should ensure its truthfulness!

Be you angry, and sin not.

If you must be angry, (and you must, sometimes), take care that you do not sin when you are angry. It is rather a difficult thing to be angry and not to sin, yet, if a man were to see sin and not to be angry with it, he would sin through not being angry! If we are only angry, in a right spirit, with a wrong thing, we shall manage to obey the injunction of the Apostle, “Be you angry, and sin not.”

Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

Never let it outlive the day, but forgive before the sun goes down.

27. *Neither give place to the devil.*

A man who harbors malice in his heart invites the devil to come in and keeps a place ready for him.

28. *Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor,*

For laziness is generally the cause of theft. If a man would work for what he needed, he would not be tempted to steal it. Paul carries his argument very far, “let him labor.”

working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needs.

What a rise there is here—from a thief up to a giver to him that needs! This is what the grace of God does. Here is a man who used to take his neighbor’s goods if he could, but, when Divine grace transforms him, he actually gives a share of his own goods to his poor neighbor—that is a marvelous change!

29-31 *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth,*

I have heard unthinking people say, “Well, if it is in your heart, you may as well

speak it—it is better out than in." I do not agree with them! If you had a barrel of whiskey in your house, that would certainly be a bad thing to be in your possession, but it would not do any hurt so long as you kept it unopened so that nobody could get at it! The mischief arises when people begin to drink it. Undoubtedly, it is an evil thing for you to have anything that is corrupt in your heart, but it will not be mischievous to other people until it begins to come out. So, "let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth."

but

Since some communication is sure to come out of your mouth, let it be a good one.

that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.

Especially take heed of that "evil speaking" against which the Apostle warns you, for there are many people who cannot live without speaking—they must talk a great deal and they often say that which is false—they invent evil, they twist an honest action and impute wrong motives to the doer of it! A few such persons in a community can cause much of heartache and distress. They little know what servants of Satan they may become. God help us to put away all evil speaking and all malice!

32. *And be you kind, one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you.*

That is, very freely, very often, very abundantly, very thoroughly, very heartily —"even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you," so also do you.

Ephesians 5

1. *Be you, therefore, followers of God.*

Or, imitators of God—

as dear children.

Children are naturally imitators. They are usually inclined to imitate their father. This is, therefore, a most comely and appropriate precept.

2. *And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.*

What a path to walk in! “Walk in love.” What a well-paved way it is! “As Christ also has loved us.” What a blessed Person for us to follow in that divinely royal road! It would have been hard for us to tread this way of love if it had not been that His blessed feet marked out the trail for us. We are to love as Christ has loved us and the question which will often solve difficulties is this, “What would Jesus Christ do in my case? What He would have done, that we may do—“Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us.” And if we want to know how far that love may be carried, we need not be afraid of going too far in self-denial. We may even make a sacrifice of ourselves for love of God and men, for here is our model—“As Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us, an offering and a Sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.”

3. *But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becomes saints.*

So far from ever falling under the power of these evils, do not even name them—count them sins unmentionable to holy ears! In what a position do we find, "covetousness," placed—side by side with, "fornication and all uncleanness"! In the Epistle to the Colossians, covetousness is called, "idolatry," as if the Holy Spirit thought so ill of this sin that He could never put it in worse company than it deserved to be in! Yet I fear it is a very common sin even among some who call themselves saints. God deliver us altogether from its sway and help us to hate the very name of it!

4. *Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient, but rather, giving of thanks.*

All sorts of evil, frivolous, fruitless talk should be condemned by the Christian. He should feel that he lives at a nobler rate, he lives to purpose—he lives to bear fruit—and that which has no fruit about it and out of which no good can come is not for him. "But rather, giving of thanks." Oh, for more of this giving of thanks! It should perfume the labors of the day! It should sweeten the rest of the night, this giving of thanks! We are always receiving blessings—let us never cease to give God thanks for them. If we never leave off thanking until we are beyond the need of blessing, we shall go on praising the Lord as long as we live, here, and continue to do so throughout eternity!

5. *For this you know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.*

What a sweeping sentence! This is, indeed, a sword with two edges! Many will flinch before it and yet, though they flinch, they will not escape, for Paul speaks neither more nor less than the Truth when he declares that "no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God."

6. *Let no man deceive you with vain words for because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*

These are the very things God hates! If, therefore, they are in you, God cannot

look upon you with the love that He feels towards His children. “These things” He cannot endure and, “because of these things comes the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.”

7. 8. *Be not you, therefore, partakers with them. For you were sometimes darkness,*

Then, “these things” suited you.

but now are you light in the Lord: walk as children of light.

Get clean away from these dark things! Travel no more in the thick gloom of these abominations! God help you to walk in the Light as He is in the Light!

9, 10. *(For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.*

We ought to pray that our whole life may be “acceptable unto the Lord.” We are, ourselves, “accepted in the Beloved.” And, that being the case, it should be our great desire that every thought and word and deed, yes, every breath of our life should be “acceptable unto the Lord.”

11, 12. *And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*

For it is a shame, even, to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. It was so with the old heathen world in which Paul lived—he could not write or speak of those abominable vices which defiled the age. But is London any better than Ephesus? Surely, old Corinth, which became a sink of sin, was not a worse Sodom than this great modern Babylon! There is great cause to say of the wicked, even to this day, “It is a shame, even, to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.”

13-18. *But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light.*

Then drag them to the Light of God! There will be a great howling when these dogs of darkness have the Light let in upon them, but it has to be done.

For whatever makes manifest is light.

Therefore He says, Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. See, then, that you walk circumspectly. Not carelessly, not thinking that it is of no importance how you live, but looking all around you, "walk circumspectly," watching lest, even in seeking one good thing, you spoil another. Never present to God one duty stained with the blood of another duty! "See then that you walk circumspectly."

Not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time,

Buying up the hours—they are of such value that you cannot pay too high a price for them!

because the days are evil.

Therefore be you not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit. If you want excitement, seek this highest, holiest, happiest form of exhilaration—the Divine exhilaration which only the Holy Spirit can give you—"Be filled with the Spirit."

19. *Speaking to yourselves in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*

We would have thought that Paul would have said, "singing and making melody with your voices to the Lord," but the Apostle, guided by the Holy Spirit, overlooks the sound, which is the mere body of the praise, and looks to the heart, which is the living soul of the praise—"Making melody in your heart to the Lord," for the Lord cares not merely for sounds, though they are the sweetest that ever came from the lips of man or angel—He looks at the heart. God is a Spirit and He looks spiritually at our spiritual praises—therefore let us make

melody in our heart to the Lord.

20, 21. *Giving thanks, always, for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves, one to another, in the fear of God.*

That principle of maintaining your rights, standing up for your dignity and so on, is not according to the mind of the Spirit! It is His will that you should, rather, yield your rights and, for the sake of peace, and the profit of your brothers and sisters, give up what you might naturally claim as properly belonging to you —"Submitting yourselves, one to another, in the fear of God."

22-30. *Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ's is the Head of the Church and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands, in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord, the Church; for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones.*

What a wonderful expression! To think that we, poor creatures that we are, should be thus joined to Christ by a marriage union, no, by a vital union—is, indeed, amazing! Oh, the depths of the love of Christ, that such an expression as this should be possible!

31, 32. *For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and the two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*

There is the mystery, that He should leave His Father, and quit the home above, and become one flesh with His elect, going with them and for their sakes, through poverty, pain, shame and death! This is a marvel and a mystery, indeed!

33. *Nevertheless, let everyone of you in particular so love his wife even as himself, and the wife see that she reverence her husband.*

Thus the Spirit of God follows us to our homes and teaches us how to live to the Glory of God! May He help us to do so, for Christ’s sake!

Ephesians 6

1. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.*

Fitting by nature and pleasing in the sight of God.

2-4. *Honor your father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth. And you fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

For the duties are like birds with two wings, or like a pair of scales—balance for each side. There is the child's duty, but there is the parent's duty, too.

5-9. *Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ. Not with eye service, as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he is bond or free. And, you masters, do the same things unto them,*

Mind that! We may hear a good deal about the duties of servants. Let us hear something about the duties of masters and mistresses. "You masters, do the same things unto them."

forbearing threats: knowing that your Master also is in Heaven; neither is there respect of persons with Him.

Very beautifully balanced is the whole system of Gospel morals. There is no undue advantage given by the fact of our being rendered equal in Christ, so that the servant is to be less obedient to the master, or the child to the parent—neither is there any undue power given to those who are in authority! But the grace of God teaches all to do unto all as we would that they should do unto us.

10. *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord,and in the power of His might.*

Everything depends upon that. Whether you are called upon to work, or to wait, or to watch, or to suffer, you have need to be strong. If you are not yourself strong, the very armor that you wear will be a burden to you. It is of the utmost importance that Christians should be as strong in grace as they can possibly be. And the power that is to be in them is to be the power of God: “the power of his might.” What a wonderful power that is! The power of flesh is weakness, and the power of man is fading but the power of God is almighty and unchangeable; and if we can be girt about with this power there is scarcely any limit to what we may successfully attempt.

“Finally,”—as if this were a matter of the highest importance, to be considered first and last.—“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.” You know how strong Paul himself was; he was a veritable giant for Christ, and he here calls upon his brethren to be as he was, he did not want to be brother to dwarfs, so he appealed to his brethren to “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

11. *Put on the whole armour of God,*

The armor of God will not serve you unless you yourself are strong. It needs a strong man to carry girdle, and breastplate, and shoes, and shield, and helmet, and sword. Let me impress upon you the fact that we must first of all get strong within, and after that “put on the whole armor of God,” that armor which God has provided for the good soldiers of Jesus Christ, that armor which distinguishes men as belonging to the army of God. Do not merely put on a part of it, but put on the whole of it. Do not simply look at the armor, and clean it up so as to keep it bright, but put it on, wear it, it is meant for you to use in the great battle for the right against the wrong

that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

He will attack you sometimes by force and sometimes by fraud. By might or by sleight he will seek to overcome you, and no unarmed man can stand against him. Never go out without all your armor on, for you can never tell where you may meet the devil. He is not omnipresent, but nobody can tell where he is not, for he and his troops of devils appear to be found everywhere on this earth.

12. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood,*

Our great fight is not against our fellow-men. As Christians, we go not forth armed with sword and shield to fight against "flesh and blood,"—

but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Our battle is against evil wherever it is to be found, against evil in every shape and form. Evil is as much in the world today as it was in Paul's time, and we must fight against it everywhere. We are not to shut our eyes to it, or try to patch up a compromise with it. Christians are bound to fight against evil principalities, evil powers, the evil rulers of the darkness of this world, and wicked spirits in high places.

13. *Therefore take unto you the whole armor of God,*

What stress the apostle lays upon this point! He repeats the command he had just given, and again emphasizes the fact that it is "the whole armor of God" that is to be worn. There are some professing Christians who only in part obey the injunction here given, but it is no use to wear a part of the Christian armor, and to leave the rest of the soul unarmed. A little leak will sink a ship, and the absence of one piece of the armor of God may cost a man his soul

that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

That is what we have to do, to keep our place and our standing as Christians right to the end. To be apparently pure and holy for a time is no use at all. Transient professors will find everlasting ruin; “but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” We are in God’s army for life; we can never quit this warfare till God shall call us home.

14. *Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth,*

Nothing will so tighten up your garments and keep them right as a belt of sincerity and truthfulness. If we are not true, whatever else we are, we are but loosely arrayed. We shall come to mischief. “Having your loins girt about with truth.”

and having on the breastplate of righteousness.

A grand protection when God has given you to be holy, and when the principle which covers your heart and shields your members is righteousness!

15. *And your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.*

Rough roads grow smooth when these blessed gospel sandals are on your feet. A little stone in the shoe will make the pilgrim’s progress a very wearisome and painful one, so try to keep out all the stones—everything about which you have any scruple, or that you think may be wrong; and walk in the safe and narrow way set forth in the gospel of peace.

16. *Above all, taking the shield of faith,*

Faith, like a shield, protects us against attack. Different kinds of shields were used by the ancients, but there is a special reference in our text to the large shield which was sometimes employed. I believe the word which is translated “shield,” sometimes signifies a door, because their shields were as large as a door. They covered the man entirely. You remember that verse in the Psalms which exactly has the idea, “Thou Lord wilt bless the righteous, with favor wilt thou compass him as with a shield.” As the shield enveloped the entire man, so, we think faith envelopes the entire man, and protects him from all missiles wherever they may

be aimed against him.

wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Not only the fiery darts of the wicked one, but those also of wicked men and wicked women who may throw at you afar darts that are all ablaze, which would burn as well as pierce you if you were not well guarded against them. Nothing can quench these fiery darts but the shield of faith.

17. *And take the helmet of salvation,*

You used to wear the helmet of pride with its fine nodding plumes, but that has been taken off by you long ago. Now put on "the helmet of Salvation." This will effectually defend your head, and no sword will be able to cleave through it to injure you. Your brain and everything that is connected with your mental powers will be right when you know that you are saved, and when the power of God's salvation is working within you.

and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

We are not merely to defend, but also to assail. It is not enough that you are not conquered; you have to conquer: and hence we find, that we are to take, not only a helmet to protect the head, but also a sword, with which to annoy the foe.

The Holy Spirit wields no sword but the Word of God. This wonderful Book, which contains the utterances of God's mouth, is the one weapon which the Holy Ghost elects to use for his warlike purposes. It is a spiritual weapon, and so is suitable to the Holy Spirit. The weapons of his warfare are not carnal: he never uses either persecution or patronage, force or bribery, glitter of grandeur, or terror of power. He works upon men by the Word, which is suitable to his own spiritual nature, and to the spiritual work which is to be accomplished. While it is spiritual, this weapon is "mighty through God." A cut from the Word of God will cleave a man's spirit from head to foot; so sharp is this sword. Though by long practice in sin a man may have coated himself as with mail impenetrable, yet the Word of the Lord will divide the northern iron and the steel. The Holy Ghost can make a man feel the divine power of the sacred Word in the very

center of his being. For battling with the spirits of man, or with spirits of an infernal kind, there is no weapon so keen, so piercing, so able to divide between the joints and marrow, so penetrating as to the thoughts and intents of the heart.

18. *Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit,*

When you cannot use your sword, and even when you can hardly grasp your shield, you can pray. That weapon of "all prayer" is of the handiest kind, because it can be turned in any and every direction. "Praying always with all prayer"—groaning prayers, weeping prayers, prayers that are made up of single words, prayers that have not a word in them, prayers for others, prayers of confession, prayers of thanksgiving.

and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

But will prayer for other people help us? Yes, very much. You will sometimes find that, when you cannot pray for yourself, it is a good plan to pray for somebody else. Think of some child of God, and pray for him, and then the fire of supplication will soon burn up in your heart. The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends, and he will do the same for you. I have heard many of our members say that, when they have felt bound in prayer, they have pleaded for their Pastor and afterwards they have been able to pray for themselves. I advise more of you to try that plan; it will do me good, and then if it also does you good, there will be a double advantage in it. Paul was of the same mind as I am, for he added—

19, 20. *And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

"An ambassador in bonds!" Such a thing was never heard of in earthly courts We never think of chaining an ambassador, but this is how men treated this great messenger from the court of heaven.

20–22. *That therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts.*

It is well for Christian people to know how it fares with their spiritual guides. Paul wished the Ephesian saints to know in what state of heart he found himself, that they might the more intelligently pray for him.

23, 24. *Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.*

I am sure that we can heartily repeat that benediction May the Lord send much of his grace to all his people, in every part of the earth, who love him in sincerity! Amen.

PHILIPPIANS

Philippians 1

1-2. *Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Grace first, for that is the fountain. Then peace comes, for that is the fitting stream to flow from the Fountain of grace. Seek not peace first, for there is no peace for unregenerate man! Grace first, then peace, and both must come "from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." The Father is the great eternal Fountain of all these blessings, but the Son is the divinely appointed channel through whom they flow down to us.

3. *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.*

Taking the long run of his acquaintance with them—remembering them from the time when he preached by the riverside and Lydia was converted—even until the moment of his writing to them as a prisoner in Rome—he knew nothing of them but that which gave him joy. He thought how they had, of their own free, will ministered again and again to his necessities when no other Church was mindful of him. Their grateful benevolence caused him to thank God. He had no dash of bitter in the cup of his happy memory of them. As long as he remembered their prayers, their courage, their faith, their labor, their unity, their constancy, their zeal, their thoughtfulness and their liberality, he felt unmingled gratitude to the Author of all these excellent things.

4. *Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.*

For some we have had to pray with tears and sighs and for others with trembling.

But the Lord so heard Paul in the past with regard to these Philippians that every time he began to pray he felt liberty in prayer—a joy in bearing their names before the Lord—and a sweet assurance that he was not praying in vain. His was not the cry of anguish but the request of delight. For these beloved ones Paul approached the Mercy Seat with boldness and confidence—he felt sure of being heard on their account.

5. *For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.*

If you look at the Revised Version it is, "for your fellowship in furtherance of the Gospel." The Apostle longed to spread the Gospel! And so did they. He was earnest to carry it to the regions beyond—so were they. If he preached, they would be there to encourage him. If he held special meetings, they were ready to help. If money was required, every man was ready according to his means, without pressing. Each one felt as earnest about the work as did his minister. They were enthusiastic for the furtherance of the Gospel—they were heartily with him where he most valued their sympathy. It was practical fellowship. Some of them preached, all of them prayed. Some of them contributed money and all gave love. Nobody shirked his work—which was not looked upon as a labor—but as a privilege. You will not wonder that Paul rejoiced, for it gives joy to every earnest man to see others earnest.

6. *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*

Paul's confidence was that the work in their hearts was a divine work. The Lord Himself had begun a good work in them! This is a vital matter. Everything turns upon the question, "Is this conversion a divine work or not?" Paul could see, in the next place, that it was a growing work, for the Lord was still performing it. The work of God is always a growing work. Paul saw God carrying on the work in the heart of the Philippians so that they went from strength to strength and about this he was confident.

He was also confident that God would perfect it. If you had never seen wheat growing, you would never imagine that the shriveled grain of corn would produce the blade, the ear and the full corn in the ear. Even so, the body is sown in weakness but it is raised in power. It is sown in corruption but it is raised in

incorruption. All glory lies in the bud of our struggling humanity when once divine grace has quickened it. He that has begun a good work in us will not only give us perseverance until death, but what is even more, He will give us perfection in the day of Christ! It is altogether a more comprehensive thought than the great truth of God of final perseverance—it includes that blessed truth of God within its sweep, but it also secures eternal glory both to soul and body.

7. *Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.*

Paul saw so much of Christ in them that he could not help admiring and loving them. And he felt sure that they were of the sort that never draw back unto perdition, but believe to the salvation of their souls. He perceived that the grace which was in him was in them, also—and therefore, as he hoped to be kept to the end—he felt that they would, also, be so kept. As he felt sure that the work of grace in them was of God, and of God alone, so he was confident that they would never fail.

Furthermore, their long-continued character confirmed the Apostle in his confidence, for he adds, “Inasmuch as both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel, you all are partakers of my grace.” When he was bound they were not ashamed of his chains. When he was in prison the jailer washed his stripes and refreshed him at his table and this proved an omen of loving liberality throughout life. When Paul was taken away to Rome, the Philippians took care that he should not be left penniless—they sent out of their poverty to his assistance. He felt confidence in a people who could do this. Shame turns many of the weaker sort aside, but the faithful despise it. Those who love holiness when others despise and ridicule it are the people to stand fast. Besides, they were partners with Paul in the defense of the Gospel. If any Galatian teachers came their way, they gave them the cold shoulder; for they would not give up the grand old Gospel to please the wise men of the period.

12-14. *But I want you to understand, brethren, that the things which happened to me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing*

confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Notice the beautiful self-forgetfulness of the Apostle Paul. So long as the Gospel could be more widely published, he did not mind where he was, or what he suffered. He was able to witness for Christ among the Praetorian guards who had the charge of the prison where he was confined and who, also, in their turn, were on duty in Caesar's palace. So Paul says that through his being in bonds there, the particulars concerning his imprisonment were talked about even in the imperial palace—and by that means the Gospel was made known to many in Caesar's household.

Then, in addition, other brethren who, perhaps, might have felt compelled to be quiet in his presence, finding that their leader was removed from them, waxed confident to come out and "speak the Word without fear." The same sort of thing has often happened since. You have sometimes seen a widely spreading oak tree cut down and you have missed its grateful shadow. Yet, afterwards, you have discovered that many little trees which would have been dwarfed beneath its shade, have grown more rapidly in its absence and, in like manner, the removal of some eminent servant of the Lord Jesus Christ has frequently made room for others to spring up and more than fill his place.

15-19. *Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife; and some also of goodwill the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yes, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.*

It is much to be desired that all who preach Christ should preach in a right spirit, but even if they do not, let us be glad that Christ is preached! Even though it is only a portion of the Gospel that is proclaimed, and there is much mixed with it from which we greatly differ, yet, if Christ is preached, his gospel will win its own way and work out His great purposes of love and mercy. You have, perhaps,

sometimes seen a little fire kindled among the dead autumn leaves which are damp. And you have noticed that despite all the smoke, the fire has continued to live and burn. So is it with the eternal truth of God. Notwithstanding all the error with which it is often dampened, and almost smothered, it will live and the Truth of God will conquer the error which is piled upon it. So Paul says, “I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”

20. *According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it is by life, or by death.*

Again I bid you mark Paul’s devotion and self-forgetfulness. It seems to be a matter of no choice with him whether he serves God in life or glorifies Him in death. The emblem of the American Baptist Missionary Union is an ox standing between a plow and an altar, with the motto, “Ready for either”—Ready to spend and be spent in labor, or to be a sacrifice, whichever the Lord pleases.

21. *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

If he lived, he lived to know more of Christ studying His Person and learning by his happy experience so that he increased in his knowledge of his Lord and Savior. If he lived, he lived to imitate Christ more closely, becoming more and more conformed to His image. If he lived, he lived to make Christ more and more known to others and to enjoy Christ more himself. In these four senses, Paul might well say, “For to me to live is Christ”—to know Christ more, to imitate Christ more, to preach Christ more and to enjoy Christ more!

“And to die is gain,” because death, he felt, would free him from all sin and from all doubts as to his state in the present and the future. It would be gain to him, for then he would no longer be tossed upon the stormy sea, but he would be safe upon the land where he was bound. It would be gain to him, for then he would be free from all temptations both from within and from without. It would be gain to him, for then he would be delivered from all his enemies—there would be no cruel Nero, no blaspheming Jews, no false brethren then! It would be gain to him, for then he would be delivered from all suffering—there would be no more shipwrecks, no more being beaten with rods, or being stoned! Dying, too, would

be gain for him, for he would then be free from all fear of death and, having once died, he would die no more forever. It would be gain to him, for he would find in Heaven better and more perfect friends than he would leave behind on earth. And he would find, above all, his Savior, and be a partaker of His Glory. This is a wide subject and the more we think over it, the more sweetness shall we get out of it.

22, 23 *But if I live in the flesh,*

That is a very different thing from living to the flesh.

This is the fruit of my labor.

He lived to work for Christ and to see souls saved as the fruit of his labor.

Yet what I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.

There were the two currents flowing in opposite directions. The Apostle seemed to hear two voices speaking to him. One of them said, “Live, and you will gather the fruit of your labor. You will see sinners saved, Churches established and the Kingdom of Christ extended in the earth.” The other said, “Die, and you will be with Christ!” So he knew not which to choose.

24-26. *Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more necessary for you. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.*

The Apostle desired to die, yet he was willing to live. Death would have been gain to him, yet he would endure the loss of living if he might thereby benefit others. Let us also always prefer the welfare of others before our own—and care rather to serve others than to make ourselves ever so happy. Now the Apostle gives these saints at Philippi a loving exhortation.

27. *Only let your conversation be as it becomes the Gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.*

What a happy Church is that where the members all "stand fast in one spirit," and where they are all, "with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel"—not striving with each other, but all fighting for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. The unity of the Church is of the utmost importance. When there is a lack of brotherly love, the perfect bond is lost—and as a bundle of rods, when once the binding cord is cut becomes merely a number of weak and single twigs, so is it with a divided Church. May we always be kept in one holy bond of perfect union with each other.

28. *And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.*

They give you up as lost because they cannot frighten you! They take it as a token of your perdition that you are not terrified by them and it is so to them. Yet, to you, the peacefulness with which you can endure slander and persecution should be a token of your salvation.

29. *For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.*

What an honor this is to be conferred upon any follower of Christ—"not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake"! It is not every Christian who receives this mark of honor. There are some Believers who have peculiarly tender places in their hearts and who are wounded and gashed by the unkind remarks of those who love them not because they love the Lord Jesus Christ. But to you, my Brother, my Sister, it is given—and you may well rejoice in such a gift—"not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake."

30. *Having the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.*

“The same agony,” it is in the Greek, as if every Christian must, in his measure, go through the same agony through which the Apostle went striving and wrestling against sin, groaning under its burden, agonizing to be delivered from it and laboring to bring others out of its power.

Philippians 2

1, 2. *If there is, therefore, any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill you my joy, that you be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

Paul did not mean to doubt that there is “any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, any heart and mercies,” for no one knew better than he did how those blessings abound to them that are in Christ Jesus. He put it by way of argument. If there is consolation in Christ, since there is consolation in Christ, since there is comfort of love, since there is fellowship of the Spirit, be one in Christ. Be not divided. Love one another—“be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” Paul knew that these saints at Philippi loved him. They had sent once and again to relieve his necessities, so he pleaded with them, by their love to him, to love each other. He does as much say, “If you really love me, if it is not a sham, if you have any sympathy with me and with my labors and sufferings. If you really have the same spirit that burns in my breast, make my heart full of joy by clinging to one another, by being like-minded, ‘having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.’”

3, 4. *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory.*

This would be a good motto for those who are intending to build new places of worship! Let them not be built through strife, because of a squabble among the people of God, but make sure that all concerned are actuated by right motives and seeking only the Glory of God. But sometimes, if one gives a guinea, another feels that he must give two, so as to excel him—this is giving out of vainglory. Let nothing be done in this way, but as unto the Lord and as in His sight, let us do all our works and give all our gifts.

But in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.

There is some point in which your friend excels you. Notice that rather than the point in which you excel him! Try to give him the higher seat. Seek for yourself to take the lowest place.

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Look not every man on his own things. Do not obey the world's maxim, "Take care of Number One." Consider how you can help others and in what way you can prosper them both in temporal things and in spiritual. You are members of a body, so one member is not to think for itself alone—the unity of the whole body requires that every separate and distinct part of it should be in harmony with the whole. Have a large heart, so that, though you care for yourself in spiritual things and desire your own soul's prosperity, you may have the same desire for every other Christian man or woman.

5. *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*

What an example we have set before us in the Lord Jesus Christ! We are to have the mind of Christ and that in the most Christly way, for here we have Christ set out to the life.

6-8. *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

.He humbled Himself, so be you not unwilling to humble yourself. Lower than the cross, Christ could not go, His death was one of such extreme ignominy that He could not have been more disgraced and degraded. Be you willing to take the lowest place in the Church of God and to render the most humble service! Count it an honor to be allowed to wash the saints' feet. Be humble in mind—nothing is

lost by cherishing this spirit, for see how Jesus Christ was honored in the end.

9-11. *Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

What we are taught here is the great Truth of God that Jesus Christ, though once He stooped to the lowest shame, is now exalted to the very highest Glory and even the devils in Hell are compelled to acknowledge the might of His power! We are also to learn from this passage that the way to ascend is to descend. He who would be chief must be willing to be the servant of all. The King of kings was the Servant of servants—and if you would be crowned with honor, by-and-by, you must be willing to be despised and rejected of men now.

12, 13. *Therefore, my Beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.*

You may very well work out what God works in. If He does not work it in, you will never work it out—but while He works within your spirit both to will and to do, you may safely go on to will and to do, for your willing and your doing will produce lowliness of spirit and unity of heart with your brothers and sisters.

14. *Do all things without murmuring and disputes.*

Do not say, “You give me too much to do! You always give me the hard work; you put me in the obscure corner.” No, no! “Do all things without murmurings.” And do not begin fighting over a holy work, for, if you do, you spoil it in the very beginning—and how can you then hope for a blessing upon it? “Do all things without murmurings and disputes.”

15. *That you may be blameless and harmless,*

None finding fault with you and you not finding fault with others— neither harming nor harmed—"blameless and harmless."

The sons of God, without rebuke

So that men cannot rebuke you and will have to invent a lie before they can do it —and even then the falsehood is too palpable to have any force in it—"without rebuke."

in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.

You cannot straighten them, but you can shine. They would destroy you if they could, but all you have to do is to shine. If Christians would give more attention to their shining, and pay less attention to the crooked and perverse generation, much more would come of it. But now we are advised to "keep abreast of the times" and to, "catch the spirit of the age." If I could ever catch that spirit, I would hurl it into the bottomless abyss, for it is a spirit that is antagonistic to Christ in all respects! We are to stay clear of all that and, "shine as lights in the world."

16. *Holding forth the word of Life.*

You are to hold forth the Word of Life as men hold forth a torch. Your shining is largely to consist in holding forth the Word of Life.

That I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain.

God's ministers cannot bear the thought of having labored in vain. And yet if some of us were to die, what would remain of all we have done? I charge you, Brothers and Sisters, to think of what your life-work has been. Will it remain? Will it abide? Will it stand the test of your own departure? Ah, if you have any fear about it, you may well go to God in prayer and cry, "Establish You the work of our hands upon us; yes, the work of our hands, establish You it." Paul cared

much about God’s work, but he did not trouble about himself.

17. *Yes, and if I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.*

If he might be poured forth as a drink-offering on their behalf, or offered up as a whole burnt-offering in the service of the Savior, he would be glad. He could not bear to have lived in vain—but to spend his life for the glory of his Lord would always be a joy to him.

18. *For the same cause also do you joy, and rejoice with me.*

To live and to die for Jesus Christ with the blessing of the Father resting upon us —this is a matter for us to joy in unitedly and continually. God help us so to do!

19-30. *Spurgeon appears never to have commented on these verses.*

Philippians 3

1. *Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.*

As much as to say, “If this were the last sentence that I should write to you, I would say, ‘Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord.’ It is your privilege, it is your duty to rejoice in God—not in your health, your wealth, your children, your prosperity, but in the Lord.” There is the unchanging and unbounded source of joy. It will do you no harm to rejoice in the Lord! The more you rejoice in Him, the more spiritually-minded will you become. “Finally, my brethren.” That is, even to the end, not with you, the bitter end, but even to the end of life, rejoice in the Lord. It is incumbent upon us, as Christians, to rise out of our despondencies. Joy should be the normal state of the Christian. What a happy religion is ours in which it is a duty to be happy!

To write the same things to you, to me, indeed, is not grievous, but for you it is safe.

Saying the same thing over and over again is safe, for your minds do not catch the Truth of God at the first hearing, and your memories are slippery. If they have not made their due impression upon you, already, perhaps they will do so when they are repeated in your hearing. At any rate, it is safe for you to hear or read over and over again the old, old story with which you are already familiar.

2. *Beware of dogs.*

Men of a doggish, captious, selfish spirit. In Paul’s day, there were some who were called Cynics, that is to say, dogs. “Beware of dogs.”

Beware of evil workers, beware of the circumcision.

By which Paul meant those Jews who made a great point of circumcision. He calls them here “the cutters,” for they mangled and cut the Church of God in pieces.

3. *For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.*

This is the real circumcision which is of the spirit and not of the flesh. The men who have abandoned all confidence in themselves. The men who have come to rely upon Christ, alone. The men who “rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,” those who care not for outward rites and ceremonies, but who worship God in the spirit— these are the true circumcision. These are three marks of the true Israel of God. Have you all of them—worshipping God in the spirit, rejoicing in Christ Jesus and having no confidence in the flesh?

4-6. *If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eight day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the Law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; touching the righteousness which is in the Law, blameless.*

Paul had been kept from the vices into which many fell. In his young days, he had been pure. And all his days, he had been upright and sincere. As far as he knew, to the best of his light, he had observed the Law of God. In another place, he calls himself the chief of sinners. And so he was because he persecuted the Church of God. But, in another sense, I may say of him that there is no man who stood so good a chance of being justified by works as Paul did, if there could have been any justification in that way. You know that it is a very easy thing, or it ought to be a very easy thing, for some people to be humble, for they have nothing to be proud of—but here is a man who had much of which he might have been proud! According to the letter of the Law, he was a diamond of the first water, yet see what a different verdict he gives after divine grace has opened his eyes!

7. *But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.*

His faith in Jesus reversed all his former estimates, so that his gains he counted to be losses. He thought it so much the worse, concerning zeal, to have persecuted the Church, and so much to his injury to have imagined that he was blameless in the Presence of God. So that, when we come to Christ, whatever we have to trust to, we must put away. We must write it on the other side of the ledger. We had entered it as a gain—now we must set it down as a loss—it is of no value, whatever! It is a loss if it shall tempt us to trust any less in Christ.

8. *Yes doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung*

—Offal, refuse, garbage—

that I may win Christ.

He had every opportunity of advancement. He was a fine scholar and might have reached the highest degree in connection with the Sanhedrim and the synagogue, but he thought nothing of all that—he threw it all away as worthless and declared that this was his ambition—"That I may win Christ."

9. *And be found in Him.*

Oh, what a precious place to be found in, "in Him," trusting in Him, hidden away in Him, a member of His body, as it were, losing myself in Him!

Not having my own righteousness, which is of the Law.

He does not say, not trusting it, but not even having it, not counting it, not thinking it worthwhile to put down among his possessions that which he once prized so much.

But that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

It must be more glorious to be justified by God than by ourselves. It must be more safe to wear the righteousness of Christ than to wear our own. Nothing can so dignify our manhood as to have Christ, Himself, to be "the Lord our Righteousness." This Paul chose in preference to everything else. Paul thinks that to be righteous by faith is infinitely better than all the righteousness that can come by works and ceremonies. He therefore utterly despises that which he once thought to be more precious that gold! And he takes possession of, as his greatest treasure, that which he once trampled in the mire. Now his great desire is—

10, 11. *That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.*

.See to what Paul is looking forward—resurrection—and therefore he lets this life go as of secondary importance. He is willing to suffer as Christ suffered and to die as Christ died. You and I may never be called to make that great sacrifice, but if we are true followers of Christ, we shall be prepared for it. If ever it should happen that Christ and our life shall be put in competition, we must not deliberate for a moment, for Christ is all, and we must be ready to give up all for Christ.

12. *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect,*

You, perhaps, suppose that Paul's present satisfaction arises out of a consciousness of personal perfection, but it is not so. He has not won the race yet —his joy arises from the fact that he is on the right course and that he is running in the right direction. I should think that any man who believed himself to be better than Paul would thereby prove at once that he was not perfect, for he must be sadly lacking in humility.

but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

"All that Christ meant me to be, I want to be. All that Christ meant to give me, I

want to have. All that He meant me to do, I want to do, to apprehend, to lay hold of that for which I am laid hold of by Christ Jesus."

13, 14. *Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended,*

That is Paul's judgment concerning himself—he has not yet attained to the full all that the religion of Christ can give him.

but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Always making progress—throwing himself into it, having the reward before him, the prize of perfection in Christ—and running towards it with all his might.

15. *Let us, therefore, as many as are mature, be thus minded.*

If you are a true believer in Jesus, be of this mind—always to be pressing forward to something higher and better. If God has given you one form of maturity, press onward to a much higher form. Seek continually to rise. The eagle's motto is, "Higher, Higher!" Let it be your motto, too. Many of God's people do not believe that He can make them what He means to make them, or, at least, they act as if they did not believe that He can. They apparently are not conscious of what their privileges really are and are living far below where they might live in the happy enjoyment of peace and power and usefulness! May God help us, by His gracious Spirit, to know all of Christ that we can and to be as much like Christ as we can.

And if in anything you are otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

I admire that sentence. If any brother has not reached a full knowledge of the Truth of God, let us not condemn him, or cast him out of our company, but say to him, "God shall reveal even this unto you."

16. *Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.*

There are some points upon which we are all agreed. There is some standing ground where the babe in Grace may meet with the man in Christ Jesus. Well, as far as we see eye to eye, let us co-operate with one another, let us have our hearts knit together in a holy unanimity. “Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” There are some people who are always looking out for points of difference—their motto seems to be, “If we differ in anything, let us split away from one another.” Their great idea is that by dividing we shall conquer! The fact is that by separating ourselves from one another, we shall miss all hope of strength and play into the hands of the adversaries.

17. *Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as you have us for an example.*

For the true servant of Christ teaches by his life as much as by his words. In these days, certain people find fault with Paul and speak of him as if he were not inspired, and not to be followed as Christ was, But here he expressly says what no man like Paul would ever say unless moved of the Holy Spirit, for he was modest and, by no means, anxious to push himself forward—“Brethren, be followers together of me.”

18, 19. *For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*

They call themselves spiritual, yet they live for earthly things, indulging their appetites, living for self, yet pretending to be Christians, whereas selfishness is the very reverse of Christianity. I lay a stress upon the article—“They are the enemies of the cross of Christ.” Professors of religion who get into the Church and yet lead ungodly lives, are the worst enemies that the cross of Christ has. These are the sort of men who bring tears into the minister’s eyes. These are they who break his heart. They are the enemies of the cross of Christ.

20. *For our citizenship is in heaven,*

Can you say that? Is your citizenship in heaven? Is your conversation there? Do you often commune with your Lord upon the throne? Judge yourselves whether it is so or not. It is a very poor thing to have a name to be in heaven and yet never to have any converse with heaven! I wish that we could all say that we talk more to God than we do to men, and have more business upward than we have here below.

from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is coming! He is coming! Are we looking for Him? This is the true position of the Christian—looking for the appearing of his Lord!

21. *Who shall change our vile body,*

Vile so far that it has been defiled by sin. Vile in comparison with that body which shall be—"Who shall change our vile body," the body of our humiliation.

that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.

We have only part of the redemption while we are here. The soul is regenerated, newly-born, but the body is not. "The body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness." The redemption of the purchased possession will be perfect at the resurrection. The resurrection will be, to the body, what regeneration is to the soul. We sometimes wonder why we are sick when Christ could make us well in a moment—but the reason is that, as yet, He has not fully brought His Divine Power to bear upon the body.

Philippians 4

1. *Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown,*

You know that the Church at Philippi was very dear to the Apostle's heart. He could never forget the time when he and Silas prayed with the women at the riverside and afterwards prayed and sang praises unto God in the prison, when the prisoners heard them. Lydia and her household and the Philippian jailor were among the first fruits of Paul's work at Philippi and there was always a very intimate love between him and the members of the Church in that place. They cared for him and he cared for them. Twice in this one verse he speaks of them as his, "dearly beloved." He says that he "longed for them, longed to come and see them face to face, longed that they might be happy in the Lord to the very highest degree. So he says, "my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy." It was such a joy to him, even, to think of them as his spiritual children and especially to see after what a godly and generous fashion they behaved themselves. Yes, and he calls them his, "crown"—a garland which he had won in spiritual wrestling! The Christian's converts are his joy, here, and they will be his crown forever in Heaven.

so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

It looks like a very simple thing to stand fast, but they who try to do it know how difficult a task it is.

2. *I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.*

These two women had fallen out with one another. They evidently differed upon

some question or other so that they were not “of the same mind in the Lord,” and Paul thought it so important that there should be perfect unity and love in the Church at Philippi, as well as everywhere else, that he beseeched these two women, of whom we know nothing else, that they would be “of the same mind in the Lord.” Notice that he beseeches each of them in exactly the same way—“I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche.” He has a, “beseech,” for each of them! Perhaps, if he had written, “I beseech Euodias and Syntyche,” the latter lady might have fancied that he was not quite so earnest about her as he was about Euodias, so he puts it, “I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.” Have any of you fallen out, my dear Friends? I do not know of any of you who have done so, but if you have, I say to all of you, men or women, “I beseech you, that you be of the same mind in the Lord.” There is nothing like perfect unity in a Christian Church! If there is even a little division, it will grow to something much worse, by-and-by, so I beseech you, “be of the same mind in the Lord.”

3. *And I entreat you, also, true yokefellow,*

We do not know who this “true yokefellow” was. Very likely it was Epaphroditus who carried this Epistle to Philippi. Whoever it was, it was someone who had worked with Paul shoulder to shoulder. If two bullocks bear the same yoke and yet do not agree, they make it very uncomfortable for one another. If one tries to lie down and the other wants to stand up, or if one goes faster than the other, the yoke becomes doubly galling.

help those women which labored with me in the Gospel,

What an eminent place women have always held in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ and here Paul speaks of them as laboring with him in the Gospel! Surely Lydia must have been one of those. They helped me, and they have helped you, so help them with encouraging words and in every other way that you can.

with Clement, also, and with other of my fellow laborers, whose names are in the Book of Life.

According to some learned commentators, a man’s name may be in the Book of

Life for a time, but it may be removed. If their teaching is true, that book will be very much scratched and blotted. I thank God that I do not believe in any such book as that! If the Lord Jesus Christ has written my name in the Book of Life, in the great family register of the redeemed, I defy all the devils of Hell to ever get it erased!

4. *Rejoice in the Lord always,*

Not only now and then, on high days and holiday, have a time of joy, but, "rejoice in the Lord always." If you ever rejoice in the Lord, you may always rejoice in the Lord, for He is always the same, and always gracious! There is as much reason for rejoicing in God at one time as at another, since He never changes.

and again I say, Rejoice.

He had said this before, as you will see in the first verse of the third Chapter, which begins, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." Now he writes it again and repeats it in the same verse—"Rejoice. Rejoice." It is so important that Believers should be full of joy that Paul writes three times over in a short space, "Rejoice in the Lord." "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice."

5. *Let your moderation be known unto all men.*

The word, "moderation," in the Greek, is a very difficult word to translate into English. It does not mean moderation in the sense in which some people use the word, for they make it, as I think, almost an accursed one. "Let your moderation"—your gentleness, your willingness, your forbearance—"be known unto all men." That is what it means. Do not push your own rights too far—stop short of what you might fairly demand and when you feel, at any time, a little vehement in temper, check yourself—hold yourself in, bear and forbear. Go not as far as you may, nor even as far as some think that you ought, in defending your own rights. Let your gentleness, your yieldingness, be known unto all men. Be men who are God-governed, because God governs those who run to excess in nothing. Some go to excess in one way and some in another, but all excess is to be avoided.

The Lord is at hand.

Christ is coming—why do you put yourself out? The Lord is near you to help you—why are you so excessively anxious? Why are you so carried away with the present temporary trial? “The Lord is at hand.”

6. *Be anxious for nothing,*

Of course you ought to be careful about everything. You cannot be too careful, but you never ought to be care-full, you must care to be right with God, yet you must not be filled with care about anything. “Be anxious for nothing.” Do not fret, do not worry, do not make other people miserable by your fretting and fuming.

but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

Ah, this is the way to find the cure for all your anxieties! Take all your trouble to God with a prayer and with a song. Do not go without either the thanksgiving or the prayer, but bear your burden at once to God and ask Him to bear it for you.

7. *And the peace of God, which passes all understanding,*

What is the peace of God? I would describe it, first, by saying it is, of course, peace with God. It is peace of conscience, actual peace with the Most High through the atoning Sacrifice. Reconciliation, forgiveness, restoration to favor there must be—and the soul must be aware of it—there can be no peace of God apart from justification through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ received by faith. “The peace of God, which passes all understanding” also takes a second form, namely, that of a consequent peace in the little kingdom within. When we know that we are forgiven and that we are at peace with God, things within us come to a sudden and delightful change.

shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Without Christ Jesus this peace would not exist; without Christ Jesus this peace, even where it has existed, can not be maintained. Daily visits from the Saviour, continual lookings by the eye of faith to him who bled upon the cross, continual drawings from his ever-flowing fountain, make this peace broad, and long, and enduring. But take Jesus Christ, the channel of our peace away, and it fades and dies, and droops, and comes to naught. A Christian hath no peace with God except through the atonement of his Lord Jesus Christ.

8. *Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report; if there is any virtue and if there is any praise, think on these things.*

If anything is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report—be on that side. A Christian is on the side of everything that makes for purity, chastity, honesty or that is for the good of men and the Glory of God! Whenever anyone is making out a list of those who will fight for everything that is right and good, every Christian should say to the man writing the list, "Set down my name, Sir." Everything of this kind concerns you, therefore help it as far as you can. Be on the side of every cause that may be thus described. If it vindicates truth, uprightness, reverence, religion, chastity, holiness—be on that side. If there is anything the reverse of this, do not have anything to do with it, but if there is any movement in the world that will help forward things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely and of good report, "think on these things," and so think upon them as to increase their influence among the sons and daughters of men!

9, 10. *Those things which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do,*

It is well when a preacher can speak like that—when he has not to say, "Do as I say and not as I do," but when, like the Apostle, he can say—"those things, which you have both learned, received, heard and seen in me, do."

and the God of peace shall be with you.

The God of Peace is always with those who receive His dear Son and who help

His Gospel. It is one of the privileges of true believers that the God of Peace shall be constantly with them.

10. *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me has flourished again; wherein you were also careful, but you lacked opportunity.*

You see that Paul did not really mean, “Be careful for nothing,” for he says here that these Philippians had cared for him and he praises them for being careful of him. They had lovingly thought of him who was their spiritual father—and when they knew that he was shut up as a prisoner in Rome, and suffering need, they took care to send something to relieve and cheer him.

11. *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.*

“I have been initiated—for that is the word—“among those who are content with such things as they have.” Is not that a splendid piece of learning? Paul was a learned man and so are you, if you have learned this lesson! You may not be able to put D.D., or LL.D., after your name, but you are a learned man if you can say, “I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.”

12. *I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound.*

These are two grand things to learn. There are some who know the first, but who do not know the second. I have known several of God’s children who seemed quite eminent for piety when they were abased, but they were never worth anything after they grew rich. They did not know how to abound— they became top-heavy and far too great for their britches! It was not so with the Apostle, for he could truthfully say, “I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound.”

Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

Was he not a true Master of Arts? He had mastered the art of being hungry without murmuring, the art of being full without boasting, the art of suffering need without impatience, the art of abounding without setting his affection on worldly things. He was, indeed, a Master of Arts of the very highest order!

13. *I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.*

There is no improper boasting, here, for Paul could do all things through Christ's mighty power! It has been well said that the angels excel in strength, but the saints excel in their weakness. When we are most weak, and Christ strengthens us, then are the most excellent virtues produced.

14, 15. *Nevertheless you have done well, that you shared with my affliction. Now you Philippians also know that in the beginning of the Gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no Church shared with me as concerning giving and receiving, but you only.*

I should not wonder if it was Lydia who was at the bottom of that giving and receiving and, perhaps, the jailer. They were evidently thoughtful and grateful people. They remembered the Apostle's sufferings and needs and did all they could to help and cheer him.

16, 17. *For even in Thessalonica you sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desired a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.*

He did not look at it as merely something that would ease him, but he looked at it as a token of gratitude for the spiritual blessings they had received through him! It showed that they loved the Gospel which he preached and that they also loved him for having been blessed by God to their souls—and this cheered and delighted him. Their liberality was set down to their account in God's book. But, to show that he was not asking for more, he says—

18. *But I have all, and abound: I am full,*

I do not suppose that it amounted to much, but it was all that the Apostle needed —and so he says to them, “I have all, and abound: I am full.”

having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.

I am sure that when they read this verse, they all felt glad that they had had a share in the subscription to relieve the Apostle’s needs.

19. *But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in Glory by Christ Jesus.*

It is Paul’s God who took care of the Philippians and it is Paul’s God who will take care of you and me! “My God,” says Paul, “shall supply all your needs—not as you have supplied mine, out of your poverty, but according to His riches in Glory by Christ Jesus”! Do not imagine that you will ever exhaust God’s riches in Glory, or drain the national treasury of all-sufficiency—that cannot be.

20. *Now unto God and our Father be Glory forever and ever. Amen.*

He blesses us, let us bless Him! He supplies all our needs according to His riches in Glory—let us extol his Glory forever and ever.

21. *Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you.*

“Give them all my love and tell them how grateful I am to them.” These hearty salutations ought to be common in every Christian assembly. I always deprecate that wonderful respectability that exists in some places of worship where nobody knows anybody else. They are too respectable to become acquainted with their brethren. If you are in Christ Jesus, get to know one another! “Salute every saint in Christ Jesus.”

22. *All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's*

household.

I suppose most of these were only slaves in the imperial household. There may have been one or two, perhaps, of a higher class, but, in all probability, the Gospel first reached the slaves in the Roman palace, that pandemonium of vice, where lust and cruelty abounded. There were saints even there—and God still has some of His jewels lying on dunghills!

23. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

The grace of that wondrous Person who is God and Man in one Person and whom we call Lord, is now solemnly invoked upon you. Read the text again and pause a while in the middle to enjoy, "The grace of our Lord." Whatever familiarity we have with Him, we call Him Master and Lord, and He says, "You do well, for so I am." Read the next word, "the Grace of our Lord Jesus"—may that be with you—that is to say, the grace of our Savior, for that is the meaning of the word, Jesus. All His saving grace, all that which redeems from guilt, from sin, from trouble—all that which saves us with an everlasting salvation—may that be yours to the fullest. Then comes the other word, "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." May He, as the Anointed One, visit you. May the Grace of His anointing be with you. May you have that anointing from the Holy One which shall make you know all things. Tarry on that word, "our." "May the grace of our Lord." Catch at that sweet word! Jesus is our Lord—our Lord Jesus Christ—both yours and ours. May the fullness of His Grace be with you and with us.

COLOSSIANS

Colossians 1

1, 2. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul begins with a salutation in which he wishes the Colossian Christians the best of all blessings. It is the very spirit of our holy religion to wish well to others and I am sure that we cannot have a better wish for our dearest friends than this, “Grace be to you, and peace.” Grace will save you—peace will make you know that you are saved. Grace is the root of every blessing—peace is the sweet flower that makes life so sweet and so fragrant. May you have both of these blessings “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”! There is no peace for you apart from this blessed combination—God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, may you know your adoption and may you know your redemption.

3. *We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.*

Paul very graciously blends his giving of thanks and his constant prayer for these Christians at Colossae and, therein, sets us an example that we may well imitate. We are not only to pray for those who have no faith, but the very fact that men have faith should lead us to pray for them. Where there is evidently life in the seed and it begins to sprout, let us water it with our prayers and with our thanks, too.

4-5. *Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you*

in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.

"Faith"—"love"—"hope"—these are three divine sisters which should always go hand in hand. We must never be satisfied unless we see in ourselves and in our fellow-Christians these three delightful fruits of the Spirit of God. Notice the order here—faith, love and then hope. Perhaps the Colossians were a little deficient in this last grace, so the Apostle prayed constantly for them, "for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." If there is a way of knowing the grace of God which is of no value, it is when it is not known in truth, that is to say, when it is only head-knowledge, not heart-knowledge. But, oh, when in truth the grace of God sinks into the soul and changes the whole nature, then it is an experience for which we may well give thanks to God.

6. *Which is come to you, as it is in all the world, and brings forth fruit, as it does also in you, since the day you heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.*

We do not know the grace of God in truth unless it brings forth fruit in us. We may know it with the head very correctly, but yet we do not truly know it unless it is knowledge in the heart, knowledge in the inner man. We do not really know it unless it affects our lives and brings forth faith love, hope—faith, which lifts us above the world. Love, which preserves us from selfishness. And hope which keeps us up under all trials.

7, 8. *As you also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.*

Epaphras told them of Paul's prayers for them and when he came back from Colosse, he told Paul of their great love in the Spirit. I like to read of these godly men speaking well of one another. Nowadays, it is thought to be a distinguishing mark of faithfulness to be able to pick holes in the coats of our fellow Christians. Now, we cannot help perceiving their defects and, sometimes, it is our duty to speak of them—and to speak of them faithfully—but let us also observe all the

virtues that are to be found in them, otherwise we may despise the work of the Holy Spirit and rob him of his Glory! How kindly Paul speaks of Epaphras, and how kindly Epaphras speaks of the Church at Colosse!

9. *For this cause we, also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.*

See, the Apostle asks even more for them than faith, hope and love—that they "might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." This shows what a valuable thing it is to know and understand the will of God! If you have the graces of the Spirit, it is important that they should be deepened, that they should grow through being fed with divine nourishment. What the water is to the plant, making it further to develop itself, that is the knowledge of God's will to our gifts and graces—they grow and become fruitful through an increase in the knowledge of God.

10, 11. *That you might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.*

If we have faith, hope, and love, it is desirable that we add to these a fullness of knowledge— and to this holiness of life and fruitfulness of service—that we may have patience to endure the afflictions of this life and long-suffering with which to put up with the provocations of the ungodly.

12-14. *Giving thanks unto the Father who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light who has delivered us from the power of darkness and has translated us into the Kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.*

Now the Apostle is handling the string he most delights to touch! He is at home with everything which concerns the welfare of saints, but when he begins to talk

of his Lord and Master, then it is that he seems to ride in a chariot of fire with horses of fire—and he grows mightily eloquent under the Inspiration of the Spirit of God! See how he talks of the great central Truth of God of the atoning sacrifice—"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." And now Paul, having mentioned his Master's great work—redemption by blood and the forgiveness of sins—goes on a tangent, as it were. He is so enthusiastic with regard to Christ and his great atoning sacrifice that the very thought of Christ's blood stirs his own blood and he seems like a man all on fire with holy fervor as he writes—

15-17. *Who is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature: for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they are thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him: and He is before all things, and by him all things consist.*

Admire this delightful passage in which the Apostle seems to burn and glow while he describes his Lord and Master, "who is the image of the invisible God." Note how Paul harps upon that one string, "He." See how much he dwells upon the divine person of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ. He will never have done praising him! He keeps on heaping up epithets to magnify that blessed name and he truly was in the Spirit of God when he did this, for it is the work of the Spirit to glorify Jesus Christ. He makes him great in our hearts and then we try to make him great by our words and by our acts. How can anyone ever read this passage and yet say that Christ Jesus is only a Man? By what twisting of words can such language as this be applied to the most eminent Prophet or Apostle who ever lived? Surely he must be God by whom all things were created, and by whom all things consist! But Paul's next sentence is, to us, the sweetest of all—

18. *And He is the head of the body, the Church,*

He is joined by an indissoluble union to his people and is the Head of their glory, their wisdom and their strength!

who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things

He might have the preeminence.

Are we giving him the preeminence in all things? That theology must be false which puts Jesus in the second place, or even lower than that! And that experience is a wrong one which does not put Christ always in the front. He must in all things always stand first!

19. *For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell.*

That we might have to go to him for it, it pleased the Father to make errands for us so as to take us to Christ and to thus make our very emptiness to minister to the Glory of Christ!

20-22. *And having made peace through the blood of his Cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they are things in earth, or things in Heaven. And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has He reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and blameless and above reproach in his sight.*

.O, Beloved, as the sun is to be seen mirrored, not only in the face of the great deep, but in every little drop of dew that hangs upon each blade of grass, so is the glory of Christ to be seen, not only in his universal Church, but in every separate individual in whom his Spirit has worked holiness!

23, 24. *If, indeed, you continue in the faith grounded and steadfast,*

This is a text that ought to be read and pondered every day by the many unstable professors who are in the Church at this present time— “if, indeed, you continue in the faith grounded and steadfast,” like a building that will have no further settling, no more splitting of the stones, no more cracking of the walls—because your foundation is secure and you are firmly built upon it!

and are not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which you have

heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under Heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

How delighted he is to have such a Gospel to preach, such a hope to tell to the sons of men! Oh, if we had to creep from a sick bed, or to come up from a dungeon—if we were aching in every bone of our body and if we were depressed in soul—this ought to be enough to make us full of gladness to overflowing, that we have such a Christ to preach and such fullness of blessing to declare to the sons of men!

who now rejoices in my sufferings for you.

Oh how blessed it is when a man has so mastered himself that his sufferings for his fellow Christians become a matter of rejoicing for himself! He not only accepts them and bears them with patience, but he says—

and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the Church.

There is nothing "behind" as to the atoning efficacy of the sufferings of Christ, but there is much yet to be endured in order that all the elect may be brought to Christ. Some must suffer through their extraordinary labors in preaching the Gospel, others through bearing reproach for the Truth of God's sake—and Paul was glad to take in his mortal body, his share of the sufferings to be endured for the sake of Christ's Church—which is his mystical body.

25. *Of which I am made a minister, according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God*

This is a wonderful expression, "made a minister." The true minister is of God's making! A man-made minister must be a poor creature, but a God-made minister will prove his calling.

26-27. *The mystery which has been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God*

would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This is the most blessed of all mysteries! I trust that many of us understand it—may the Holy Spirit reveal it to any who know it not! “Christ in you” is glory begun, a sure pledge and earnest of a glory greater than you can yet conceive! If He is in you, you have the beginnings of heaven! You have, in fact, the excellence and flower of heaven, for there is no heaven but the glory of Christ.

28-29. *Whom we preach,*

That is, Christ. It is not so much what we preach as whom we preach. We preach the Person of Christ—“whom we preach”—

warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which works in me mightily.

There will never be any mighty work come from us unless there is first a mighty work in us—no man truly labors for souls unless the Holy Spirit has first worked mightily in him. Nothing can come out of a man but what God puts into him. We work to will and to do when He works in us according to his good pleasure. Oh, for more of the agonizing of the Spirit within us, that there might be more of agonizing in our spirits for the glory of God!

Colossians 2

1. *For I would that you knew what great conflict I have for you and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh.*

Paul had not met these Colossian Christians, but he had heard of their faith, hope, and love—and he so desired their good that he had a continual care for them in his heart. He carried that care to God in prayer, yet he still bore them in loving remembrance. They were always on his heart as a sick child is always on the heart of its mother.

2, 3. *That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

He wanted them to know God and to rest comforted and happy in what He revealed. He saw in them a tendency to look abroad for something more than that—a desire to tack something else to the Gospel, a wish to try and find some fresh light outside the Word—and over this he greatly grieved. He himself was more than satisfied with the Gospel and he wanted them to be, in that respect, as he was.

4. *And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.*

They did not openly contradict the Gospel. They pretended to have a great affection for it and then they tried to tear the very heart out of it with their enticing words of man’s wisdom!

5. *For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.*

He never forgot them and it was his joy, when he found them standing fast in Christ—but his sorrow and his horror when they went away after anyone else.

6. *As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk you in him.*

That is, keep on as you began. Christ was enough for you when, as poor, guilty sinners, you came and trusted him, so keep on trusting him in the same way as you did at the first. Do not try to live by feeling, after having lived by faith. Do not begin to live upon outward forms and ceremonies after having found salvation by grace through faith. Do not turn away from him, do not dream of going beyond him. You received him very simply at first—you trusted in him entirely—so go on doing so. You were satisfied with Christ when you first came to him, so be satisfied with him, still, for you do not need anything more than Christ—and there is nothing more than Christ!

7. *Rooted and built up in him,*

Take a living hold of Christ as a tree does of the soil. Also be built up in him—as a building settles down upon the foundation—so do you settle down upon Christ. Christians are to make progress in the heavenward road, but they are not to have any other foundation for their faith than they had at the beginning of their Christian career. We are still to stand fast as we stood at the first. We are to be rooted, grounded, “established in the faith,” keeping to the old Truth of God that saved our souls, and laying hold upon the same Savior with greater tenacity every hour of our lives. We are not to be like chaff driven before the wind—forever moving—but to be like the cedars of Lebanon, firmly rooted and withstanding the heaviest storms.

and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

When a man is established in the truth of God that he knows, and rejoices in what he has already received, he will not go away from it. Do not forget what you have been taught! Do not reject it—keep to it. He who should learn one system of philosophy, and then unlearn it, and begin another, and then unlearn that, and begin another, would be more likely to turn out a fool than a philosopher! And he who begins to learn the faith in one way, and then tries to learn it in another way, and then attempts to learn it in yet another way is more likely to be a skeptic than to be a saint.

8. *Beware lest any man spoil you, through philosophy and vein deceit.*

Beware of those who pretend that they are going to enrich you, but whose real objective is to plunder you. They say that they will give you advanced thought, deeper ideas, a system more congruous with the age. Cleave to Christ! Go no further than He leads you and turn not away from him either to the right hand or to the left. In him are contained all the riches of grace, and all the treasures of knowledge. If you would become truly wise, seek to know more of the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus.

8. *After the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*

Plenty of people would spoil you in this way, by teaching you their profound thoughts, their grand inventions, their bright ideas. Beware of all of them! What do you want with their traditions? Christ has revealed his truth to you. What do you want with the world's rudiments? You have gone beyond such elementary, useless knowledge as that, for you have got the truth of God itself.

9. *For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*

Everything, then, must be in Christ if all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him! Why do you need to go anywhere else for wisdom? What can you find by going elsewhere? In Christ we enter into the fullness and completeness of life both materially and spiritually!

10. *And you are complete in him, which is the head of all principality*

and power.

You have everything in Christ that you ought to need. You are fully furnished, completely supplied and equipped for all future service. You need not go to Christ for the supply of some of your needs and then go elsewhere for the supply of other needs, but, “you are complete in him.”

11. *In whom also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.*

The Jew boasts that he is a circumcised man, but you have spiritually all that circumcision meant literally! Even though you have not the wound in your flesh, you have more than that, for you have the death of the flesh and your very flesh has been buried with Christ. All that circumcision can possibly mean you have in Christ. Whatever there was of blessing and privilege in the covenant mark in the flesh of those whom God made to be his people in the olden time, you have handed on to you by the death of Christ. All that the Jew ever had, you have in Christ, only you have the real purification of which his rite was but a symbol.

12. *Buried with him in baptism, wherein also you are risen with him through the faith of the working of God, who has raised him from the dead.*

You have death, burial and resurrection, all in Christ. And you received the outward sign and token of this when you were baptized, so believe firmly that it is so and do not look anywhere else for it. You are neither dead nor buried apart from Christ, nor are you driven apart from him—all you have is in him.

13. *And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has He quickened together with him, having forgiven all your trespasses,*

You do not need to go to a ‘priest’ for pardon, for Christ has forgiven you all your trespasses. You are so complete in Christ that confession to man and

priestly absolution from man would be of no use to you.

14. *Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his Cross.*

All the Mosaic ceremonies from which you were shut out as Gentiles, are abolished! Christ has driven a nail through them and fastened them up to his Cross. As sometimes a banker stamps a check when it is paid, so has Christ cut through the very heart of all Jewish ordinances by what He has done for his people.

15. *And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

Exhibiting them as his prisoners in a triumphal procession, as the victorious Roman generals did when they returned from war. The Lord Jesus Christ has done everything for his people—fought their battle, won their victory and, on their behalf, celebrated the triumph in the streets of Heaven, “leading captivity captive.” What more, then, do we need? Your enemy is vanquished, your sins blotted out, your death changed to life, your necessities all supplied! Surely Christ is enough for us!

16. *Let no one, therefore, judge you in food, or in drink, or regarding a festival, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath.*

Do not put yourselves under rules and regulations which God has not ordained. If you think it is right for you to abstain from certain drinks, do so, but do not act thus simply because others do so. If you abstain from certain foods because they have been offered to idols, and the consciences of others might be offended if you partook of them, do not act thus as though it would save you. Do not make yourself subject to the judgment of other men, for Christ is your Lawgiver and Lord. If you choose to do anything, or to abstain from something else because you judge it to be right and beneficial, do so. Christ is your only Ruler and Leader—and if He does not command anything, let it not matter to you who does command it.

17. *Which are a shadow of things to come; but the substance is of Christ.*

You can do without the shadow, now that you have the substance, so keep to that. Some men multiply church ordinances—they have this form and that form. Well, let them have them if they find them of service, but do not bring yourself under subjection to anything of the kind! Follow the New Testament and above all things keep close to Christ, for He is everything to you.

18. *Let no man beguile you of your reward in false humility,*

We know those who say, “We do not know anything, we are only seekers, trying to find out the truth.” They talk very humbly considering how desperately proud they really are, but that humility which makes men doubt is mock humility and is not of God.“Let no man beguile you of your reward.” When you have learned the Truth of God from the Scriptures, be dogmatic about it! Do not be afraid of the presumption of which some will accuse you, or the bigotry which they will impute to you.

and worship of angels,

Do not be beguiled by those who tell you that you ought to pay reverence to angels, saints and I know not what besides. One day is called St. Matthew’s and another is St. Michael’s. And one, I suppose, is St. Judas’s day—there are all sorts of supposed saints, some of whom are never mentioned in the Bible and about whom nobody ought to care at all!

intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.

Agnostics by their name confess that they do not know, but do not let them take away from you what you know and set you to investigate matters which are beyond you with a judgment which they would lead you to think is well-near infallible, whereas your judgment is very fallible, indeed. Be not puffed up by your fleshly mind!

19. *And not holding the Head,*

That is the point—these people get away from the Deity of Christ! They get away from the atoning blood. They get away from glorifying him who alone is the Truth!

from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increased with the increase of God

Take away the Head and there is death—everything is out of order then. If the Head is denied—if any Doctrine is taught which is contrary to the Glory of Christ, you have killed the body however much you may pretend to be increasing and feeding it!

20-22. *Therefore if you are dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are you subject to ordinances? (Touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using), after the commandments and doctrines of men?*

I have actually seen this text quoted as though it stood as a matter of teaching —"Touch not; taste not; handle not"—whereas the Apostle here means, "Why are you subject to such ordinances of men when Christ has set you free from them all? If, with a view to the good of your fellow men, you choose not to touch, or taste, or handle, you will act very wisely. But, as far as your own conscience is concerned, do not submit to any merely human regulations as to your manner of life." You had better leave poisonous drugs alone, but at the same time, if any man seeks to impose upon you any regulation concerning them as a part of the faith, you may resist it and repudiate it—and plead your freedom in Christ.

23. *Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship*

There were some of the Jews who would not eat certain kinds of meat, and others who would fast for long periods. Some thought it was very wicked to eat meat on a certain day—and there were many such notions—and similar

superstitions still survive among us, such as not eating meat on Fridays, being afraid of 13 people sitting at table and so on! But you have nothing to do with all that kind of rubbish, so get away from it! If you are a Believer in Christ, tread all such nonsense under your feet. “Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship.”—

and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor.

There is no honor about such things, they are contemptible—“not in any honor”—

to the satisfying of the flesh.

That is all such things would do—make you seem better than other people—so do not be led into these ways, but stand fast in the liberty in which Christ has made his people free!

Colossians 3

1. *If you, then, are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.*

Oh, how often we need to be called to this, for the flesh is groveling and it holds down the spirit. Very often we are seeking the things below as if we had not yet attained the new life, and did not know anything about the resurrection power of Christ within the soul. Now, if it is that you, Believers, have risen with Christ, do not live as if you had never done so, but "seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God."

2. *Set your affection*

Not "your affections." Tie them up into one bundle. Make one of them.

on things above, not on things on the earth.

You say that you were dead with Christ and that you have risen with Christ. Live, then, the risen life, and not the life of those who have never undergone this matchless process. Live above.

3. *For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

The old life is dead. You are dead to it. You will not be consumed by it—you cannot be controlled by it. You have a newer and higher life. Let it have full scope.

4. *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also*

appear with him in glory.

Paul's marvellously rich expression indicates, that Christ is the source of our life. It is by his life that we live; he is in us, the hope of glory, the spring of our actions, the central thought which moves every other thought. Christ is the sustenance of our life. What can the Christian feed upon but Jesus' flesh and blood? Christ is the solace of our life. All our true joys come from him; and in times of trouble, his presence is our consolation. There is nothing worth living for but him; and his lovingkindness is better than life. Christ is the object of our life. As speeds the ship towards the port, so hastes the believer towards the haven of his Saviour's bosom. As flies the arrow to its goal, so flies the Christian towards the perfecting of his fellowship with Christ Jesus. As the soldier fights for his captain, and is crowned in his captain's victory, so the believer contends for Christ, and gets his triumph out of the triumphs of his Master. "For him to live is Christ." Christ is the exemplar of our life. Where there is the same life within, there will, there must be, to a great extent, the same developments without; and if we live in near fellowship with the Lord Jesus we shall grow like him. We shall set him before us as our Divine copy, and we shall seek to tread in his footsteps, until he shall become the crown of our life in glory. Oh! how safe, how honoured, how happy is the Christian, since Christ is our life!

5. *Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth—fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

.Since you are dead, let all the lusts of the flesh be put to death. Kill them! They were once a part of you. Your nature lusted this way. Mortify them! Do not merely restrain them and try to keep them under. These things you are to have nothing to do with.

6, 7. *For which things the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience. In which you also walked some time, when you lived in them.*

"When you lived in them." But now you do not live in them. You are dead to them. If it should ever come to pass that you fall into any of these things, you

will loathe yourself with bitterest repentance that you could find comfort, satisfaction, life in them. You are dead to them.

8-10. *But now you also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not to one another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.*

No lies. Such communications are filthy. But you put these things away through your union with Christ in his risen life. Therefore, abhor them. Avoid the very appearance of them and cry for grace to be kept from them, for you have been "renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."

11. *Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*

In the new life there is no distinction of race and nationality. We are born into one family. We become members of Christ's body and this is the one thing we have got to keep up—separation from all the world. No separations in the Church, no disunion, nothing that would cause it, for we are one in Christ and Christ is all. Now, as we have to put off these things, that is the negative side—that is the Law's side, for the Law says, "You shall not." But now look at the positive side.

12. *Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, hearts of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering,*

This is what you have got to wear, even on the outside—to put them on, not to have a latent kindness in your heart and a degree of humbleness deep down in your soul if you could get at it—but you are to put them on. They are to be the very clothes you wear. These are the sacred vestments of your daily priesthood. Put them on!

13. *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man has a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do you.*

Just as readily, just as freely, just as heartily, just as completely!

14-15. *And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts,*

For that is the great foundation of every godly fruit. We are in such a hurry, in such dreadful haste, so selfish, so discontented, so impetuous, and the major part of our sins spring from that condition of mind. But if we were godly, restful, peaceful, how many sins we would avoid!

to which, also, you are called in one body; and be you thankful.

It looks like a very small virtue to be thankful. Yet, dear friends, the absence of it is one of the grossest of vices. To be ungrateful is a mean thing. To be ungrateful to God is a base thing. And yet how many may accuse themselves of it! Who among us is as grateful as he should be? Be thankful.

16-17 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*

Alexander had a casket of gold studded with gems to carry Homer's works. Let your own heart be a casket for the command of Christ. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you."

18. *Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.*

See how our being Christians does not relax the bonds of our Christian

relationship? On the contrary, it calls us to the higher exercise of the responsibilities and duties connected therewith.

19. *Husbands love your wives, and be not bitter against them.*

Oh, there are some spirits that are very bitter! A little thing puts them out and they would take delight in a taunt which grieves the spirit. I pity the poor woman who has such bitterness where she ought to have sweetness—yet there are some such husbands.

20-21. *Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.*

The duties are mutual. Scripture maintains an equilibrium. It does not lay down commands for one class, and then leave the other to exercise whatever tyrannical oppression it may please! The child is to obey, but the father must not provoke.

22. *Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye service, as men pleasers.*

How much there is of that! How quickly the hands go when the master’s eye looks on! But the Christian servant remembers God’s eyes and is always diligent.

Colossians 4

1-2. *Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that you, also, have a Master in Heaven. Continue in prayer.*

It is interesting to remark how large a portion of Sacred Writ is occupied with the subject of prayer, either in furnishing examples, enforcing precepts, or pronouncing promises. What does this teach us, but the sacred importance and necessity of prayer? We may be certain that whatever God has made prominent in his Word, he intended to be conspicuous in our lives. If he has said much about prayer, it is because he knows we have much need of it. A prayerless soul is a Christless soul. Prayer is the lisping of the believing infant, the shout of the fighting believer, the requiem of the dying saint falling asleep in Jesus. It is the breath, the watchword, the comfort, the strength, the honour of a Christian. If thou be a child of God, thou wilt seek thy Father's face, and live in thy Father's love.

And watch in the same with thanksgiving.

See how he keeps putting that in—"Be you thankful"—"with thanksgiving." Why, that is the oil that makes the machinery go round without its causing obstruction! May we have much of that thanksgiving.

3, 4. *Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.*

So the preacher of the Gospel asks your prayers—and it is a part of the duties arising out of the relationship between Christians that those who are taught should pray for those who teach God's Word.

5-18. *Spurgeon appears never to have commented on these verses.*

1 THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 1

1. *Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul is very full of Christ. His heart is full of love to God our Father, and, therefore, it is that twice over in as many lines he mentions both names. He uses no vain repetitions, as the heathen do; but his inmost soul is taken up with communion with the Father and with the Son; and so in one single verse he twice gives us their names.

2–4. *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.*

Paul had a very high opinion of the Church in Thessalonica, and no doubt it deserved it. See how he speaks of it—with such confidence. “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.” Their character was such that he felt sure that he saw the mark of God’s elect about them, and he speaks most positively of them —perhaps more positively than he does of any other church. Well, there were three grand signs. There was the work of faith, the labor of love, and the penance of hope; and where we see three works of the Spirit we may be fully persuaded that electing love is there.

5. *For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power,*

and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Paul never had a happier time in preaching, it would seem, than when he preached to these Thessalonians. He felt a power resting upon him. He spoke with great positiveness and assurance the gospel, and consequently the people received it in power, and the assurance of the hearer made the assurance of the speaker. It is a great mercy when it is so.

6. *And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:*

Ah! dear friends, we read of one that he was more honorable than his brethren because his mother bore him with sorrow. And so when faith is born in the heart in the midst of affliction, it is a very precious faith. It is faith indeed. “Having received the Word in much affliction with joy.” I seem to see that joy of theirs floating, like Noah’s ark, above the floods of their affliction. It seems to be a contradiction teat we can be in affliction and yet be full of joy. But many a believer will toll you that there is no contradiction in it. He knows what it is to be sorrowful, and yet to be always rejoicing.

7. *So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.*

Brethren, let us not only be Christians, but let us be samples of Christians.

They are sure to pick out the best for a sample. Oh! that we might be such that, if God himself were to select Christians to show what they are like, he might select us to be samples.

8–10. *For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how 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.

Paul here states that all the churches abroad knew what a wonderful time he had had with the Thessalonians, and with what alacrity they had received the gospel, and how they had turned away from their idols in thorough earnest to become worshippers of the living God. This was a great comfort to Paul, and he speaks about them here with great joy.

1 Thessalonians 2

1, 2. *For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.*

Paul went to Thessalonica from Philippi with a sore back, but with a sound heart. He went resolved to spend and to be spent for his Lord in that city, being affectionately desirous of winning them to Jesus, the apostle was willing to have given unto them, not the gospel of God only, but even his own life. The Lord accepted the cheerful sacrifice, and gave the apostle the reward he sought.

3. *For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:*

We have heard of preachers who, under the rose, believe very differently from what they openly say. The trust-deed requires some little consonance with evangelical doctrine, but they loathe it in their souls, and tell their brethren so in private. But as for us, “we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully.” We dare preach everything that we believe, and preach it as plainly as possible. The more you know us through and through, the more glad we shall be.

4. *But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel,*

Yes, and how sweetly God hath trusted us; also, for he has put us in trust with the gospel, he has trusted us with influence over other men’s souls, he has trusted some of us with little ones whose mortality will feel our influence, he has trusted us with his name and honor, for according as we live in holiness will he be

honored among the sons of men. He has placed wondrous confidence in us.

even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

He would not be the servant of Christ if he pleased men. Those whom we try to please, are our masters. If a man tries to please the populace, or to please the refined few, these are his masters, and he will be their flare; but if he tries to please his God, then is he a free man indeed.

5. *For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness:*

Paul's description of his own ministry and that of Timothy also should be true of every servant of Jesus Christ. There must be no dishonesty, or craftiness, or deceit about the minister of the Word, and it is by the manifestation of the truth that he must commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. He may not win every man's approval, yet even those who differ from him must perceive his loyalty to his Lord.

6, 7. *Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:*

So will the Church do, through her ministers, her officers, and, indeed, through all her members if they act up to their duty. She will be watching for the souls of men, especially for those souls that are the saddest, and the most cast down, and the most subject to temptation and to trial; she will watch over them and nurse them. And she will never be happy, let me add, until she brings all her children up to her Husband's house in heaven. She is expecting him to come by-and-by; and when he comes, it will be her joy to meet her Husband leading her daughters with her. And she will say, "Come forth, ye daughters of Jerusalem, and see him who is greater than king Solomon crowned with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals.

8. *So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.*

These are the men who make our missionaries; these are the women to make our nurses for the sick, these are they that would dare death for Christ; these are they who would give of their substance to his cause; these are they who would spend and be spent, who would bear ignominy, and scorn, and shame if they could but advance their Master's interest.

9. *For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.*

Paul threw his whole strength into the work of upbuilding that church, toiling night and day for it; and consequently he obtained his desire; for still it is true in the husbandry of God, that those who sow, and steep their seed in the tears of earnestness, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

10. *Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe:*

We shall not win success unless we hunt for it by careful lives. You wish to see your Sunday-school class converted. You are anxious to be blest on your tract-district. You want to see that little mission-hall crowded, and souls converted. Begin by looking to your own life. As the man is, depend upon it, so will his life-work be. There will not come out of any one of us that which is not in us. You must fill the pitcher, or you cannot go round and fill the cups of those who thirstily ask you for water. That which you would in part of grace or life must be in yourself first; and when God has wrought it in you, then it shall be yours to work out.

11, 12. *As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of*

God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

"You are called to be sons of God, you are called to be one with Christ, you are called to be kings and priests unto God; this is the highest possible vocation that anyone can have, so walk worthy of it." O beloved, if we walk worthy of this vocation, what holy and noble lives we shall lead! The apostle so much desired godliness and holiness to be the characteristics of those to whom he wrote that he used very strong terms of entreaty.

13. *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing,*

It is a pleasant sight to see anybody thanking God; for the air is heavy with the hum of murmuring, and the roads are dusty with complaints and lamentations. It is a delightful vision to see hard-working, earnest ministers of Christ met together and occupying their time with thanksgiving; for many waste their hours in speculations, doubtings, and discussions.

because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God,

To receive the gospel as the word of man is not to receive the gospel; but to receive it as a revelation from God, true, sure, infallible, so as to risk your whole soul on it, and to feel that there is no risk—this is to receive the gospel in truth. After this manner we receive it with the deepest reverence; not as a thing that I am to judge, but as that which judges me; not as a matter of opinion, but as a sure truth with which I must make my opinion agree. It makes all the difference whether we rule the truth or the truth rules us. The reverent obedience of the understanding to the word of the Lord is a great part of sanctification.

To receive the gospel as the word of God is to receive it with strong assurance. Other things may be true, but this must be true. Other things may be questioned, but this must be implicitly believed. This gospel of Jesus Christ is of God as surely as you live, and you have not received it at all if you do not know it to be the word of God.

which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

This gospel, if it is received as the word of God, comes with power. The power we mean is by no means a common thing! It is not the force of persuasion, nor the energy of rhetoric; it is divine power—the finger of God. There is still in the world a miraculous force—the divine energy of the Holy Ghost. It does not give us to speak with tongues, neither do we hear it in rushing, mighty wind; but it is as unmistakable to those who have it as if it did come with such extraordinary signs.

14-16. *For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus:*

Here are people converted in Judaea, and they are of a strongly Jewish type; quite another set of people over at Thessalonica become converted to Christ, and though they are thoroughly of the Greek type, they are very like the converts in Judaea. They know nothing about the law of Moses, they have been heathens, worshipping idols; and yet, when they are converted, the strange thing is, that they are exceedingly like those Jews over yonder, to whom idolatry was an abomination. Greek believers are like Hebrew believers. They have never spoken to one another, and nobody has been there to tell them the peculiarities of Christians, and yet a family likeness is distinctly visible.

for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen,

The assault by the mob, recorded in Acts 17, was, doubtless, only one of their many trials. They remained steadfast, enthusiastic under all their tribulations; and hence the gospel was sounded out by them. Cowards hold their tongues, but brave men are not to be put down. Having already borne slander, reproach, and misrepresentation of every kind, we are not abashed, but rather are hardened to endurance, and publish our belief more unreservedly than ever.

even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles

that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

The siege of Jerusalem, and the blindness of Israel are a terrible comment upon these words.

17. *But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.*

He never forgot them; and it was his joy when he found them standing fast in Christ.

18. *Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us.*

Why should the devil take so much interest in keeping these three men from that particular Church? Here is the master of all evil, the prince of the power of the air, intently watching the journeying of three humble men; and apparently far more concerned about their movements than about the doings of Nero or Tiberius. These despised heralds of mercy were his most dreaded foes; they preached that name which makes hell tremble; they declared that righteousness against which Satanic hate always vents itself with its utmost power. With malicious glance the archenemy watched their daily path, and with cunning hand hindered them at all points.

It strikes us that Satan was desirous to keep these apostolic men from the Church of Thessalonica because the Church was young and weak, and he thought that if it was not fostered and succoured by the preaching and presence of Paul he might yet slay the young child. Moreover, he has of old a fierce hatred of the preaching of the gospel, and possibly there had been no public declaration of the truth throughout Thessalonica since Paul had gone, and he was afraid lest the fire-brands of gospel truth should be again flung in among the masses, and a gracious conflagration should take place.

19, 20. *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not*

even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.

Paul had been the means of their salvation, and when he thought of that blessed result he never regretted all that he had suffered: his persecutions among the Gentiles seemed light indeed since these priceless souls were his reward. They were his crown given as a reward for his life-race. This among the Greeks was usually a wreath of flowers placed around the victor’s brow. Paul’s crown would never fade.

1 Thessalonians 3

1, 2. *Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:*

Paul, and Silas, and Timothy, were very desirous to visit the Church at Thessalonica, but they were unable to do so. Their will was overruled as to visiting the Church together, but being anxious for its welfare, they sent Timothy alone to minister for a time in its midst.

3, 4. *That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.*

Paul was a true hero; a hero of even a nobler stamp than those brave Greeks whose stories still stir the blood and fire the soul. Their heroism to a large extent depended upon public note, the present approval of their fellow-citizens, or upon the animal excitement of the battle-field; but Paul's heroism, so far as man was concerned, was self-contained, deliberate, and as sure to display itself in the solitude of a dungeon as in the assembly of the faithful.

5. *For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.*

The serpent was most subtle, and so is the evil one most cunning. You think you

understand the ways of Satan; but you are mistaken. You have been tempted by him these thirty years, and you believe your experience can unravel all his plots. Ah! he has been engaged in the work of tempting men for nearly six thousand years; and he is not only much older, but he is far more acute and more sagacious than you are. His ways are not easily found out; and though we are not ignorant of his devices, we know not which device he will next use. If we have successfully escaped his nets for forty years, the skillful fowler may even yet entangle us. We have need each day to cry, “Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.”

We do not know where he now lurks, or from what quarter he will next shoot his arrows; but we may rest assured that he is always plotting mischief against the people of God, and he is working subtilely—to effect their pollution. From the evil machinations of the subtle one, may the Lord deliver us!

6. *But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:*

Ministers, who are really sent of God, greatly rejoice in the spiritual prosperity of their people. If they see God’s word prosper, they prosper; if the church of God is blessed, they are blessed. Their life is wrapped up in the spiritual life of their people. Never is the servant of God so full of delight as when he sees that the Holy Spirit is visiting his hearers, making them to know the Lord, and confirming them in that heavenly knowledge.

7, 8. *Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

When the man of God sees his people living to God at a high rate of piety, he speaks many things which otherwise he never would have spoken. He glories in the work of God, and with no bated breath or trace of hesitation, he points to his people, and cries, “See what God has done!” He exults over his converts with a holy joy. He cries, “See what they used to be and what they are now! See how

life has been made to spring up in the midst of death, and how light shines where overtime darkness reigned."

9, 10. *For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?*

He was a poor man, so he could not take any golden or silvern gifts; but he was a chosen man, so he believed that he could impart unto them some spiritual gift. Oh, what a largess does a man of God distribute when his Lord is with him!

11, 12. *Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:*

May your heart dance at the very thought of the infinite love of God which he displays towards you! And then may you have love towards men, loving your neighbor as yourself with that compassionate love which is pictured in the parable of the Samaritan, that love which does not say, "Be ye warmed, and be ye filled," but which proves itself to be real by deeds of charity and acts of kindness! May you abound in love to God's people; may your love be exceeding abundant to those who are your brethren and sisters in Christ, whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life!

13. *To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.*

The apostle would have us ground our confidence of perseverance upon the confirmation which divine faithfulness is sure to bestow upon us. He says in 1 Corinthians 1:8, "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." And again he

speaks to the same effect in 1 Thess 5:24, “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”

1 Thessalonians 4

1. *Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.*

Is not that beautiful? To live so as to please God in all respects! Some live to please themselves, and some to please their neighbors, and some to please their wives, and some to please their children, and some live as if they wished to please the devil; but our business is to please him in all things whose servants we are. Without faith it is impossible to please him; so away with unbelief! Without holiness no man shall see him, much less please him; therefore let us follow after holiness, and may the Lord work it in us.

2, 3. *For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification,*

It stood in the divine decree, that there should be a people chosen from among men, a people who should be called out from among the mass of the ungodly, who should be drawn by supernatural power to follow after that which is right and good and holy, who should be washed in the blood of Jesus, and renewed by the Holy Spirit in the spirit of their minds, and henceforth should be a peculiar people, in the world but not of it, the people of God set apart unto himself, to be his now, and his hereafter for ever and ever. I delight to remember that this is the will of God, even our sanctification, our separation from the world.

that ye should abstain from fornication:

“Flee fornication,” said one of old, and there was wisdom in the counsel; there is no way of overcoming it but by flight. If the temptation attack thee, shut thine

eye and stop thy ear, and away, away from it; for thou art only safe when thou art beyond sight and earshot. “Ye that love the Lord, hate evil;” and endeavor with all your might to resist and overcome it in yourselves.

4-10. *That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.*

We are to follow holiness—this must be practical holiness; the opposite of impurity. It is practical, vital holiness which is the purport of this admonition. It is conformity to the will of God, and obedience to the Lord’s command. It is, in fine, the Spirit’s work in the soul, by which a man is made like God, and becomes a partaker of the divine nature, being delivered from the corruption which is in the world through lust.

9, 10. *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;*

Paul did not only quietly pray for the church, but he added his earnest admonitions. There was a big heart in Paul towards the Thessalonians. He wanted them to grow in love “more,” and then to take another step, and add another “more” to it. The exhortation being given out of a full heart, behold, God has fulfilled it to his servant, and the people have willingly followed up the apostolic precept.

11, 12. *And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business,*

There is so much dirty linen in our own house needing to be washed that none of

us need to take in our neighbor's washing. "Mind your own business," is a command that might have be spoken by Solomon himself, and Peter very sternly condemned those who were "busybodies in other men's matters."

and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

Christians should be good citizens. Though in one respect they are not citizens of this world, yet as they find themselves in it they should seek the good of those among whom they dwell, and be patterns of order.

13. *But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.*

You cannot help sorrowing, for you miss your dear ones so much; but you do not sorrow like the heathen who believe their departed friends to be extinct and annihilated. You have a glorious hope concerning those who have fallen asleep in Christ, you believe that they still live, and that, by-and-by, their bodies will rise again.

14. *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*

There is such a union between Christ and his people that they never can be divided from him. In life, they live in him, in death, they seep in him; and when he comes again, he will bring them with him. Christ cannot be without his people. A head without a body would be a ghastly thing, and Christ without his people would be incomplete and imperfect.

15. *For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.*

We shall have no preference over the saints who are sleeping in Jesus, we shall not go before them, we shall be on a blessed equality with them.

16, 17. *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God:*

There shall be shoutings when he comes, as if all the angelic bands lifted up their voices in acclamation, and above them all one voice shall ring out most majestically, the voice of the archangel: and yet above all other sounds a trumpet-call shall thunder forth, most dreadful to the ears of ungodly men. Louder than ten thousand thunders shall it peal o'er earth and sea, and none shall be able to resist the summons. Then, in his descent, the Judge shall pass into the region of the clouds upon a great white throne shall he sit, and every eye shall see him, and they also which crucified him. His coming will be with great pomp of angelic splendor, fit for the state of such a King and for the solemnity of such a day.

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:

Fancy not, beloved, that in heaven they have no emotion but that of joy; we know that all their emotions are joyous, but among them is this one—that they, too, are waiting until the Lord shall again manifest himself, for, in the day of his appearing, those disembodied spirits shall put on their resurrection bodies, changed and made like unto Christ's glorious body; and, in that day, they shall be united with all the saints who remain upon the earth, for, without them, the glorified spirits above could not be made perfect; that is to say, the Church of God above cannot be perfected as to all its members till those who are still in the world of trial shall be brought home to meet with them, and so the whole Church shall be "for ever with the Lord." Therefore, if any of you are troubled because you are waiting for the return of your Lord, and he seems long in coming, I remind you that the whole Church of Christ is waiting; the whole twelve tribes of our spiritual Israel are "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body," at the return of our Lord.

and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Whatever ideas we have concerning the details of Christ's coming, this summing up of the whole matter is unutterably precious to us: "so shall we ever be with the Lord." There is no separating Christ and his people. If you are one with him, he will not be in heaven and leave you behind; nor will he be glorified in the presence of his Father without making you to be partakers of the glory. What joy there is for us in this blessed truth!

18. *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

The very words it appears were dictated by the Holy Spirit the Comforter, to be repeated by the saints to each other with the view of removing sorrow from the minds of the distressed. The comfort is intended to give us hope in reference to those who have fallen asleep.

As ye see your brethren and your sisters departing one by one from among you, sorrow not as those that are without hope, but say unto each other, "They are not lost, but they have gone before," for," blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."

1 Thessalonians 5

1, 2. *But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.*

That is, most unexpectedly to an ungodly world. Even they who are watching for Christ's coming may be to some extent surprised at his appearing, as the most watchful person may be when the thief at last comes; but we shall not be taken altogether unawares. We shall be, at least in a measure, prepared for the coming of the Lord, but as for the world at large, it will be an awful and surprising visitation—

3. *For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*

A terrible text that—"They shall not escape." They shall not escape by their own power or force or wisdom. They shall not escape even by the annihilation which they might well desire, but which shall not come to them. They shall not escape.

4. *But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.*

You know that Christ will come. You expect the dissolution of this present state. To you therefore, it will come as one who calls at daytime. You cannot know the hour. You must not know it; but since you know that he will come, and come to your joy; and since you are in the light, you look with gladness to that coming.

5, 6. *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;*

Night is the time for sleep, and we sleep best in the darkness; but if we have come into the daylight, if the Sun of Righteousness has risen upon us, let us be wakeful, let us be watchful. When the sun is shining, it is not right that men should sleep: "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others;"—

But let us watch and be sober.

Watchfulness and sobriety are appropriate duties for the day. To be ever serving our Lord with constancy, and to keep ourselves from the fascinations of the world which make men's minds drunk—may these two things be our daily care.

7. *For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.*

Even in Paul's day, drunkenness was a thing that seemed more at home in darkness than in the light. As for us, brethren, let us never be carried away by excess—either drunkenness of body or inebriation of mind—for there is a drunkenness which abjures the cup, and yet is as gross an intoxication as the other is. We may be drunk with pride, or drunk with ambition, or drunk with wrath, or drunk with worldliness; but we are to avoid all these evils, because we are not now in the night, when these drunken fits might be in some sort of harmony with the surrounding darkness.

8. *But let us, who are of the day, be sober; putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.*

We are of the day, but it is a day of battle. Put on armor, therefore. Be as soldiers that are covered with a panoply. Especially take care of your heart—put on the breastplate. Faith and love are the sacred protection for this.

Take care that ye have both. Take care of your head—that also is a vital part; put

on the helmet. Hope will do that. A good hope in Christ Jesus will guard you from many violent attacks that will be made upon your judgment.

9. *For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,*

See there is no ordination to condemnation. Believing in Christ, we have the evidence that we are elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the spirit and obedience, and sprinkling of blood.

10. *Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.*

They who have served their day and generation, when they sleep are not parted from their Lord. They become not the children of the darkness by that fact, for he died for us, that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with him. Whether we are living here or living there, we shall still live together with him.

11. *Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.*

It is a good church of which we can say this, especially if we can say it of all the members that they edify one another. Living stones in a living temple should seek to build each other up. May we all try to have a sacred commerce in our knowledge, and other gifts as one trading with another.

All may enrich and edify one another. “As also ye do.” Why did he tell them to do it, then, if they were doing it? Answer—that they might keep on doing it. The horse that runs best may still be the better for a spur.

12. *And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;*

You see, in the church of old they edified one another, but for all that they did not cast off God’s ordinance of Christian ministry. There was rule in the church

then as there should be now; and the apostle, when he speaks of this individual edification, this mutual instruction, does not forget to notice those who were the pastors of the flock.

13. *And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.*

Consider them in your prayers; give them all the help you can; do not be strangers to their office, and to the burden which it brings. God has set them over you. Regard them in that light. Esteem them very highly, not as masters, as though they were lords, but as being over you.

And be at peace among yourselves.

There is an end to church prosperity when there is an end of peace.

14. *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly,*

There are some that never will be ruled; their very idea of being a Christian is that they shall do just as they like. It is a somewhat happy circumstance that there are sects where they can do so. There are formed now-a-days thee little knots of people who will have no rule and church government, and who meet to edify one another. Though they speedily go to pieces, it is perhaps the better for the churches that they are quit of them.

Comfort the feeble-minded,

They want cheering. You needed it once; return the benefit you have received. Do not be out of patience with them for being so foolish. If their minds be feeble, you cannot expect much better from them.

Support the weak,

Give them something to cling to. As some climbing plants put out their tendrils and need to be helped up, so may you be a prop to these climbers.

Be patient toward all men.

Think of what patience God has with you.

15, 16. *See that none render evil for evil unto any man;*

Not in any case. The world advises you to pay a man in his own coin, but if he pays you bad coin, he is wrong, and if you pay him bad coin there will be two wrongs. Do not do so.

but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore.

You have always something to rejoice in; make the world ring with Christian music.

17. *Pray without ceasing.*

Praise and prayer are fit companions. You will soon leave off rejoicing if you leave off praying. By ejaculations, keep up your prayers while at your books. You will not disturb your avocations by continuing still in supplication and prayer. That provender hinders no man's journey.

18. *In every thing give thanks;*

Try to do so for everything, and if you cannot do it, in everything give thanks for something else—when you are in circumstances which do not excite your thankfulness just then.

18. *For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

God wills it. This moved the Crusaders to the war. Let this suffice to move you in thanksgiving.

19. *Quench not the spirit.*

Do not hinder his movements in yourself; do not try to hinder them in others. If any man hath a gift which he might use to edification, do not discourage him, but rather encourage him to get more grace. God may find him opportunities of making use of it. Quench not the Spirit.

20. *Despise not prophesyings.*

If they are vain and false, despise them if you will, but that prophecy especially which deals with the Word of God, for the Word here does not signify merely prophecies of the future—it is often used of regular preaching. Despise not anyone who speaks in God's name. He may speak with blunders of grammar—forget them; if he be correct in his teaching of divine truth, if he speaks to your heart, if he warns you, if he warns under the Spirit of God, never despise him.

21. *Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.*

That first sentence is got to be quite a proverb, but that last, I believe, is taken away, which is another instance of the common truth that half the truth is a lie. You must give it all or none. "Prove all things, is mischievous teaching, unless you "hold fast that which is good." And, after all, in the very first sentence it is not so much "Prove all things," as "Prove all things"—that is, take nothing on trust. Do not believe it because you are told so. Search the Scriptures; test what you have received, but when you have tested it, do not go about to be for over proving it. Hold it fast; grip it; grapple it to you as an ox to the stall. Hold fast that which is good.

22. *Abstain from all appearance of evil.*

By which is not meant as some read it, "from everything that somebody likes to say looks like evil." This would be to mar the Christian liberty. But wherever evil puts in an appearance, when it appears to be good, when it has been dressed out—for the word may refer to a Roman spectacle, or grand procession. Avoid evil even when dressed out in its best, when it comes on in all its gallant show to attract you. Avoid every species and kind of evil—that might almost be the

translation—abstain from it altogether.

23. *And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

In the Christian man there is a trinity. His nobler nature is that which he got when he was regenerated, and it is his spirit. His soul he has got, in common with other men. His body he has in common with animals. All, however, must be fully consecrated to God. I pray God your whole spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

24. *Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.*

What a word of good cheer that is. Sanctification often seems to be a thing far off, but he will do it. He that called will perfect. The work which his wisdom began, the arm of his strength will complete.

His pro-praise is yea and amen. God never did forget yet.

25. *Brethren, pray for us.*

Because sometimes people think that those of high spiritual attainments do not need their prayers, Remember, if they have a higher position, they have greater dangers.

26. *Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.*

This was the token of friendship in the East. To attempt to import it to the West would be not only absurd, but wicked. I may properly read them, “Greet all the brethren witch a hearty shake of the hand; keep up the outward form of fellowship, for if you don’t you will soon forget the fellowship itself.”

The kiss was the Oriental custom; it was to be kept up. The shake of the hand is our Western custom. Let it be kept up. And I delight to see it when Christians

meet, and cordially greet each other after the custom of their land.

27. *I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren*

The Pope would charge you that it be read to nobody; but who is he? It seems that this Epistle was intended to be read by all the Church, and so also the whole Bible. It is said it is not safe to trust it with the brethren; it is not safe to trust them without it; it is not safe to keep back God's Word from any man. Let the whole Book he read, and I am sure the mere read the better, especially if the last verse be true of every reader.

28. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.*

A loving spirit, when it can actually do no more, naturally seizes upon the ever open outlet of good wishes, benedictions, and intercessions. Thus the great heart of the apostle relieved itself; though he would have been willing to lay down his life for the brethren, yet he did not think it idle to give them his blessing, nor did they reject it as worthless because it cost him nothing.

It was meet that he who had in so many ways proved his sincere love to the saints should in his letter give utterance to it by pronouncing inspired blessings upon them Thus wrote the apostle of the Gentiles to those he longed to serve; "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

2 THESSALONIANS

2 Thessalonians 1

1. *Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians*

Paul loved to associate his fellow-workers with himself when writing to his brethren and sisters in Christ. Although he had a superior experience to theirs, he put Silvanus, and Timothy, his own son in the faith, with him as his fellow-evangelists in writing to “the church of the Thessalonians”—

in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

What a wonderful expression! The Church is in God as God is in the Church. What a blessed dwelling-place for the people of God in all generations.

2. *Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is the apostle’s usual salutation when he is writing to a Christian church. When he is writing to a minister, it is “grace, mercy, and peace,” for God’s most prominent servants especially need great mercy on account of their heavy responsibilities and many shortcomings; but to the church Paul’s greeting is, “Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

3. *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet,*

We do not feel this bond as much as we ought; we often feel ourselves bound to grumble and complain, but I question whether we think enough about being bound to praise God; and if we do not thank God as we ought for ourselves, it is little marvel if we are very slack in the duty of thanking him for others. Herein, then, let us imitate this devout apostle, and let us consider ourselves bound to thank God always for our brethren.

because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

What a kind of sacred network Christian love makes, intertwisting every believer in Christ with every other believer! "The love of every one of you all toward each other boundeth." Oh, that this might really be the case in all the churches of our Lord Jesus Christ!

4-7. *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgement of God,*

One of the clearest proofs of the judgement to come is to be found in the present sufferings of the saints through persecutions and tribulations; for if they, for the very reason that they love God, have to suffer here, there must be a future state and time for rectifying all this that is now so wrong.

that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which ye do suffer: seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us,

For us who believe in Jesus there is a long Sabbath yet to come, to be spent with the apostles and the other holy ones around the throne of God and of the Lamb, even as Paul wrote to the Hebrews, where remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."

when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

This rest, then, it seems, is to be given to us mainly when Christ shall come with his mighty angels.

8. *In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

These are to be punished, it seems, though their sinful ignorance is mentioned in the threatening. Wilful ignorance of the Lord's will is in itself sin, and the sin which cometh of it is grievous in the sight of the Lord our God.

I wonder what those persons, who say that it is not the duty of men to believe the gospel, make of this passage. Clearly, the gospel demands and commands man's obedience, and those who will not believe it shall be punished, not only for their other sins, but for this as their chief and damning fault, that they will not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as set before them in the gospel of his grace.

who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power,

To die as to the first death is the separation of the body from the soul; it is the resolution of our nature into its component elements, and to die the second death is to separate the man, soul and body, from his God, who is the life and joy of our manhood. This is eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, this is to have the palace of manhood destroyed and turned into a desolate ruin for the howling dragon of remorse, and the hooting owl of despair, to inherit for ever.

This is a note of great terror to all those who are ignorant of God, and wickedly unbelieving concerning his Christ. Let them take heed, for the Lord will gain glory by the overthrow of his enemies, and those who would not bow before him cheerfully shall be compelled to bow before him abjectly: they shall crouch at his feet, they should lick the dust in terror, and at the glance of his eyes they shall utterly wither away

10. *When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.*

To destroy the wicked is a matter of necessity in which his spirit takes no delight, for he doth this, according to the text, not so much when he cometh to do it as when he shall come with another object, namely, "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in them that believe." The crowning honor of Christ will be seen in his people, and this is the design with which he will return to this earth in the latter days, that he may be illustrious in his saints and exceedingly magnified in them.

The saints of God shall be so pure, so bright, such trophies of the Redeemer's power to save, that he shall be admired in them. We know that, in God's great temple of the universe, everything doth speak of his glory; and so, in the great spiritual temple of his Church, every separate saint shall show forth the glory of Christ.

11, 12. *Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the word of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

The very people in whom Paul gloried, and over whom he rejoiced, were those for whom he continued still to pray; and he did well, for the highest state of grace needs preserving, and there is a possibility of going beyond the utmost height to which any have yet attained.

Ministers should be much in prayer for their people. When John Welsh's wife found him on the ground with his eyes red with weeping, and she found that he had been there supplicating by the hour together, she asked him what ailed him, and he replied "Woman, I have three thousand souls to care for, and I wot not how they all prosper; therefore must I wrestle with God for them all." Oh, that we felt more the weight of our ministry! It is, perhaps, the great fault of this age that so many, who do preach, yet preach with so little earnestness, and are not sufficiently alive to the value of immortal souls. Oh, that the Holy Spirit would

make our ministry to be “the burden of the Lord” upon us!

2 Thessalonians 2

1, 2. *Now we beseech me, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.*

Paul believed in the Second Coming of Christ, for he beseeches the brethren "by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." He felt the power of this great truth. He often exhorts us to be watchful, because of the uncertainty of the time of that coming as far as we are concerned. But there were some who sprang up in his day, as in ours, who professed that they knew a great deal about the Second Advent, when it was to happen, and so on, and they began to foretell and to prophesy beyond what was really revealed of God. By this means, some persons were terrified, and others driven to a very foolish course of action. It would seem, from this Epistle, that some people forsook their daily calling, and on presence of the near return of Christ, endeavored to live upon the alms of Christian people, instead of themselves working. Many, however, were shaken in mind; so Paul wrote to reassure and strengthen them: "That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand."

3. *Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;*

I believe that, to a large extent, this has already happened, and that the "man of sin" has been revealed. This "son of perdition" has had a long, dark, and terrible reign over myriads of men, and still he sitteth on the seven hills of Rome, and ruleth over multitudes of his fellow-sinners. But Paul held that it was consistent

to expect the Lord to come quickly, and yet to know that certain events must occur before he did come. That is just the condition, I think, to which a man's mind will come if he diligently and impartially reads the Scriptures, especially the prophetic parts of them. The Lord will come in such an hour as we think not, yet there are clear indications of certain things which are to happen before he does come.

4. *Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.*

It has been usually thought that this passage alludes to the great apostasy of the Church of Rome, and, certainly, if there were a hue and cry raised for the culprit here described, one might well arrest that apostasy upon suspicion. It may not, however, be the man of sin, or the son of perdition; it may be that general spirit which springs up again and again, one of the many anti-Christs that were already in the world even in John's day. There are many such spirits that are constantly rising up, not outside the Church, there, we could deal with them, but inside the Church, using the words of truth, and the signs of truth to signify something far other than the truth of God. This is the great rook that threatens destruction. Oh, that God's Church might ever be kept from striking upon it! But there is this rook which would, if it were possible, wreck the very elect barque of Christ itself.

5–7. *Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work:*

There were certain reason why that gigantic iniquity should begin to be developed even while the Roman Empire was in power to keep it in check; and when that passed away, there was the opportunity for "the mystery of iniquity" to become the despot of the world.

only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

There was something that hindered the full development of anti-Christ in Paul's

day. When that was taken out of the way, then would there be a fuller revelation of this sinful system.

8–10. *And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.*

This is the last sin of all, that ungodly men do not receive the love of the truth." If they were themselves true, they would love the truth; if the grace of God was in them, his own precious truth would be prized by them above everything else, but when men finally reject the truth by which they might be saved, God visits them with terrible judgments.

11, 12. *And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

We will not attempt to explain all this in detail. It would be too much of a task for a mere exposition; but the Church has always to be on her guard against that which comes as an angel of light, but is really a spirit of darkness.

13. *But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*

How the saints praise one another! How sweet is Christian fellowship! How we rejoice in the blessed love of God to his people when we are assailed by those who battle against his truth! Then is the love of the brethren stronger than ever, and our faithfulness to God is largely increased. The apostle falls back upon the doctrine of electing love: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." And he admires the methods by which that love effects its purpose: "Salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Men are

made holy by the Spirit of God, the holiness is that of life, and of the understanding.

They attain to a belief of the truth, as well as to a practice of the divine commands. Oh, happy people who are ordained from the beginning unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth!

14. *Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

How the apostle loved the gospel! It was Christ's gospel, but Paul calls it, "Our gospel." He and his brethren had made it so completely their own, and it had become so much their own in contradistinction to "another gospel, which is not another," that he speaks of it with unction and joy: "He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15. *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.*

They had heard Paul preach; he had not only written to them; but he had also spoken to them; and he bade them treasure up what he had said, and what he had written, and hold it fast as for dear life. The apostle did not preach that which he afterwards left, as the ostrich leaves its eggs; but he watched over it, and he watched over the people who had heard it, anxious that the truth to which they had listened should prove in them to be the message of everlasting life. Oh, are there not still some of you who have heard our gospel, to whom we have often and long spoken, and yet, notwithstanding, it has not yet been the message of eternal life to you though it has been to many others? God have mercy upon you, and yet bring you to the feet of Jesus!

16, 17. *Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.*

I believe in an established Church, not established by acts of Parliament but

stablished by the purpose and by the presence of God in the midst of it. Oh, to be a member of a Church stablished in every good word and work! Do you know God's Word? Seek to know it better still, try to strike your roots down deeply into this fruitful soil, suck out the divine nutriment of it, that you may grow so strong that none shall be able to tear you away from it. Have you begun to work for Jesus? May you be stablished in that good work! Go on working more and more, with both your hands and all your heart, that somehow you may glorify his blessed name. Let me read these sweet verses again: "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work."

2 Thessalonians 3

1. *Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the LORD may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you:*

A most important request. What can the ministers of the gospel do, if their people cease to pray for them? Even if their own prayers be heard, as they will be, and a measure of blessing be given, yet it will be but a scant measure, compared with what it would be if all the saints united in their intercessions. Whenever we see the word of God very mighty in one place it ought to encourage us to pray that it may be the same in another place, for it is the same word and the hearts of all men are alike, The same spirit can give the same blessing in every place. Hence Paul says, “Pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified even as it is with you.” Now, if any of you in your church are enjoying rich prosperity, pray for others, that they may have the same. And, it you are without it, take courage from any church which you see prospering, and ask the Lord to do the same things for you. Very likely if we prayed more for ministers they would be more blessed to us. There is many a man who can not “hear” his minister and the reason may be that God never hears him pray for his minister.

2. *And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.*

I really do not know which is the worst to put up with—an unreasonable man or a wicked man. A wicked man may do you all sorts of mischief, but you soon know him. But an unreasonable man—you do not know where to find him, and he can attack you from all sorts of places. Alas! there are some very unreasonable Christians—very good in some points, but very stupid; and a stupid man may set a village on a blaze quite as easily as a wicked man. The stupid man’s accident may be as dangerous as another man’s design. Pray also

“that we may be delivered from wicked and unreasonable men, for all men have not faith,” and all men have not sense, I may also add.

3. *But the LORD is faithful,*

There is the mercy. Whether men be fools or knaves, the Lord is faithful.

Who shall establish you, and keep you from evil.

We are taught to pray for this grace. We are here told that we shall have it. Since God is faithful he will keep us from evil.

4. *And we have confidence in the LORD touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.*

Our obedience to apostolic ordinances should be of the present and of the future. It should be fixed in our souls. What the Lord has commanded in his church by his apostles should be carefully regarded by us.

5. *And the Lord direct your hearts*

You see, Paul does not command the Thessalonians to do anything but what he can pray God to work in them. The command of a man, by itself, is nothing, but when he only asks that to be done which he can pray God to do, then there is power about his message.

into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

The two things go together. When we love God, we long for the glory and the appearing of his Son. The most loving spirits in the world have had most an eye to that glorious coming. Note Enoch who walked with God and prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord cometh.” Note Daniel, “a man greatly beloved,” and a seer who looked into the future and saw the Ancient of Days. Mark also John who leaned his head on Jesus’ bosom, we may say of him that he spoke more of the second coming than all the rest of the apostles. When the heart gets right

away from earth and is set upon God, then it is that we begin to long for the manifestation of the Lord from heaven.

6. *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.*

Paul had been to Thessalonica, and had given oral teaching, and now he commits to the book what he had spoken; but he bids them take care not to associate with those who wilfully broke the ordinances of the church which he had taught them. There are some brethren with whom it is ill for us to associate, lest they do us hurt, and it is ill for them that we associate with them, lest we seem to assist them in their evil deeds. Especially is this so in the case of brethren of the glass that he is about to describe—mischief makers, troublers, people that can always tell you the gossip of a congregation, that can tear a neighbour's character to pieces that are able to perceive spots on the sun; people who delight in parading the fault of God's own children, and are never so happy as when they are making others unhappy by what they have to retail. These are the kind of people to whom you should give a wide berth.

7–9. *For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you, neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us.*

The apostle had a right to be supported by those among whom he labored. He always insists upon that right; but for their good, knowing the tendency of that age, he himself abjured that right; and he is indignant that there should be others who did nothing whatever as to Christian ministry, but who availed themselves of the charity of the church at Thessalonica so as to be able to live upon it without work.

10. *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*

A very capital rule, indeed. There are some so very spiritually minded that to soil their hands is also to soil their conscience. They are afraid of hard work. They think it is unspiritual; whereas there is nothing in the world, next to the grace of God, that is more likely to keep men out of mischief than having plenty to do.

11. *For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.*

Not doing their own business, and therefore putting their noses into everybody else's business. If they had minded their own affairs, they would have left other people alone. There are such people alive now. We must not be surprised if we meet them seeing that they were alive in the apostle's days; if they troubled him it must be small marvel if they trouble us.

12. *Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.*

The best bread and the sweetest, is our own. We are to work for it. We are to work with quietness. I suppose to some that is very hard work, but they must labor after it, for quietness is a Christian grace, it is indeed a high Christian attainment.

13. *But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.*

Pluck up courage. Do not be a coward. Hope on, hope ever. Work on, even though the task becomes more and more trying to you. Do not despise your vocation, nor stay your hand, be not weary in well doing.e

14, 15. *And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

This kind of Christian discipline ought to be carried out still, in reference not only to this one ease of busybodies, but to all other cases. When a church grows large, there can be no efficient discipline from one man, or from all his officers

with him. There must be the discipline of the whole church towards itself, each Christian, according to his measure of grace, seeking the good of the whole; for while every man must bear his own burden, yet is it said, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” “Look not every man upon his own things, but also upon the things of others.” The careful desire to promote the. Christian welfare of all our fellow members is a very different thing from being busybodies. We must have equal desire not in any way to interfere where we should not.

16. *Now the Lord of peace himself give ye peace always by all means.*

What a sweet benediction! And how he heaps the words together, as if peace was one of the greatest blessings a church could have. Indeed, dear brethren it is the essential to all other blessings. I am quite certain that we never should have enjoyed here the long years of perpetual prosperity which we have had, if it had not pleased the Lord to keep us always in peace. So may we be for many and many a year to come! May no root of bitterness ever spring up to trouble us, but may this text be fulfilled—“Now the Lord of peace give you peace always by all means.”

The Lord be with you all.

“The Lord be with you all,” saith he, and if the Lord be with us, what matters it to us whether he personally comes at once or chooses to delay? We should be looking for his coming, but not with alarm, for the fact that he has come already is a well-spring of delight. We glory in his first advent, and do not dread the second: since we are already raised up into the heavenly places to sit with him by faith, what matters it to us whether he is up there or down here, or whether we are in heaven or on earth, so long as we abide in him. There may arise, possibly there will arise, wild fanatics who will again spread alarming news about wars and rumors of wars, and select some fatal year as the end of all things. Well, if such things should be, if crowds should go into the wilderness or into the city to look for the coming of Christ, believe them not, but sit ye still in peace and tranquillity of spirit and say, “My soul loves him and he loves me. He cannot mean ill to me whether he destroys the earth or spares it. Though the heavens pass away and the earth itself melt with fervent heat, my heart is resting in her Lord and knows herself to be secure.”

17. *The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which it the token in every epistle: so I write.*

I suppose he always wrote a part of each epistle. Probably through the failure of his eyesight he was unable to write the whole of it with his own hands, but employed some one of his brethren to be his amanuensis. But, in order that every one might know the epistle to be genuine, there was always a little of Paul's writing, sometimes in big text-hand, as when he says to one church, "You see how large a letter I have written unto you with my own hand."

18. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

So with great courtesy and a comprehensive prayer he finishes his letter.

1 TIMOTHY

1 Timothy 1

1. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope;*

Christ is our hope; we have not a shadow of a hope apart from him. I remember, when on the Continent, seeing on a cross the words “Spes unica,” the unique, the only hope of man; and that is true of the cross of Christ, and of Christ who suffered on it, he is our hope.

2. *Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Notice the apostle’s triple salutation, “Grace, mercy, and peace.”

Whenever Paul writes to a church, he wishes “grace and peace”; but to a minister he wishes “grace, mercy, and peace.” Ah! we want mercy more than the average of Christians; we have greater responsibilities; and, consequently, might more readily fall into greater sin, so to a minister Paul’s salutation is, “grace, mercy, and peace.”

Note, too, that the “grace, mercy, and peace” are to come “from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” Father and Son are united in the gracious act of bestowing “grace, mercy, and peace.” The Father is the great eternal fountain of

all these blessings, but the Son is the divinely appointed channel through whom they flow down to us.

3, 4. *As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.*

You see, the apostle, in his day, had to contend against those who ran away from the simplicity of the gospel into all manner of fables and inventions. Such, in our day, are the doctrine of evolution, the doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God, the doctrine of post-mortem salvation, the doctrine of the final restitution of all men, and all sorts of fables and falsehoods which men have invented.

5–7. *Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from, which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.*

There were some who put the law into its wrong place. They made it a way of salvation, which it never was meant to be, and never can be. It is a way of conviction. It is an instrument of humbling. It shows us the evil of sin; but it never takes sin away.

8. *But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully;*

In its own place it has its own uses, and these are most important.

9, 10. *Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured*

persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;

This long list of sins the apostle declares to be contrary to sound doctrine; from which we gather that one test of sound doctrine is its opposition to every form of sin. That doctrine which in any way palliates sin may be popular, but is not sound doctrine: those who talk much of their soundness, but yet by their lives betray the rottenness of their hearts, need far rather to be ashamed of their hypocrisy than to be proud of their orthodoxy.

11. *According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.*

Our apostle was, by the drift of his letter, led incidentally to make mention of the gospel; and then, in a moment, taking to himself wings of fire, he mounts into a transport of praise, and calls it "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." Such is his mode of writing generally, that if he comes across a favourite thought, he is away at a tangent from the subject that he was aiming at, and does not return until his ardent spirit cools again.

Which was committed to my trust.

Paul speaks not here of himself alone; he might have said, "which is committed to the trust of every believer in Christ." The gospel is a priceless treasure, and the saints are the bankers of it. It is committed to our trust as men commit business to their agents.

12, 13. *And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*

Saul of Tarsus was a blasphemer. He does not say that he was an unbeliever and an objector, but he uses a very strong word, though not too strong, and says that he was a blasphemer. He was a down-right, thoroughgoing blasphemer, who also caused others to blaspheme. From blasphemy, which is a sin of the lips, Saul

proceeded to persecution, which is a sin of the hands. Hating Christ, he hated his people too. He was also injurious, which I think Bengel considers to mean that he was a despiser; that eminent critic says “blasphemy was his sin towards God, persecution was his sin towards the church, and despising was his sin in his own heart.” He was injurious—that is, he did all he could to damage the cause of Christ, and thereby injured himself. He kicked against the pricks, and by doing so injured his own conscience. Having sinned thus grievously Paul makes a full record of his guilt in order that he may magnify the grace which saved even the chief of sinners.

Paul must have written this verse with many tears. What a wonder of grace it was that he should be put into the sacred ministry, to bear testimony for Christ, when he had been before a blasphemer!

He almost thought that, if he had done all this wilfully, be might not have been forgiven; but he felt that here God spied out the only extenuating circumstance, namely, that he was mistaken: “I did it ignorantly, in unbelief.”

14, 15. *And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am, chief.*

He spoke from his heart, from deep experience. This indeed was to him the glorious gospel of the blessed God, that had saved him, the very chief of sinners. He could therefore with confidence commend it to others as worthy of all acceptation.

16. *Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.*

The case of Paul is not a singular one; it is the pattern one. If there are any here who feel that they have sinned like Saul of Tarsus, they may be forgiven like Paul the apostle. He is a pattern to all who should thereafter believe in Christ to life everlasting. Just as we often see things cut out in brown paper, and sold as

patterns, so is the apostle Paul the pattern convert. What God did for him, he can do for thousands of others.

17. *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, he honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Paul could not help this outburst of praise. He must put in a doxology.

When he remembered his own conversion and pardon, and his being entrusted with the ministry of the gospel, be was obliged to put down his pen, and lift up his voice in grateful thanksgiving to God. So may it be with us, be with us, as we remember what great things the Lord hath done for us!

18. *This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;*

Solitary prowess is expected of believers. I hope we may breed in this place a race of men and women who know the truth, and know also what the Lord claims at their hands, and are resolved, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to war a good warfare for their Lord whether others will stand at their side or no.

19. *Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:*

It is your hollow dissemblers who resent all questionings, and take umbrage at any suspicions. The man who knows that he has pure gold to sell is not afraid of the aquafortis with which the goldsmith tests it, nor even of the crucible into which he may cast. Not so the impostor who hawks a baser metal; he entreats you to be satisfied with his warranty, though it is as worthless as his wares; search yourselves; examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves; know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" By yonder wreck, cast away upon the rocks of presumption; by the cries of souls who, concerning faith, have made shipwreck, while they dreamed they were sailing gloriously into harbor—I beseech you make sure work for eternity, and take care that your answer to the question, "Lovest thou me," is well weighed,

truthful, and sincere, lest you should split on the mane reefs and be lost, for ever lost!

20. *Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

If a man hath fallen, and even if the church be obliged to put him away, we do not deliver such a one to Satan that he may blaspheme, but that he may learn not to blaspheme. The object of church discipline should always be the good of the person who has to endure it. There is no more Christlike work anywhere than for elder Christians to be watching over the young ones, checking their first declensions, nipping the evil in the bud—no nobler work, unless it be the restoration of those who have actually gone astray.

1 Timothy 2

1, 2. *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.*

Many in the Lord's family are not enabled either to be the teachers of the church or the winners of souls, but they are called by the duties of a humble, quiet life, to adorn the doctrine of God their Savior in all things. Such as these should see to it that their conversation is always such as becometh the gospel of Christ and befits the household of faith; and it should be their earnest prayer that what is preached by some may be illustrated by themselves in their daily walk and conversation.

3. *For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*

It is quite certain that when we read that God will have all men to be saved it does not mean that he wills it with the force of a decree or a divine purpose, for, if he did, then all men would be saved. He willed to make the world, and the world was made: he does not so will the salvation of all men, for we know that all men will not be saved. Terrible as the truth is, yet is it certain from holy writ that there are men who, in consequence of their sin and their rejection of the Savior, will go away into everlasting punishment, where shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

What then? Shall we try to put another meaning into the text than that which it fairly bears? I trow not. You must, most of you, be acquainted with the general

method in which our older Calvinistic friends deal with this text. “All men,” say they—“that is, some men”: as if the Holy Ghost could not have said “some men” if he had meant some men. “All men,” say they; “that is, some of all sorts of men”: as if the Lord could not have said “all sorts of men” if he had meant that. The Holy Ghost by the apostle has written “all men,” and unquestionably he means all men.

Does not the text mean that it is the wish of God that men should be saved? The word “wish” gives as much force to the original as it really requires, and the passage should run thus—“whose wish it is that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.” As it is my wish that it should be so, as it is your wish that it might be so, so it is God’s wish that all men should be saved; for, assuredly, he is not less benevolent than we are.

5. *For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;*

He is our great High Priest and Intercessor. “No man cometh unto the Father but by me.” “I am the door,”—the way of access to God. There is but one who can be trusted with our soul affairs, even the Lord Jesus Christ; and woe to us if we put our confidence in men! Ordained or unordained, shaven or unshorn, they cannot help us.

6, 7. *Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.*

The preaching, obviously, demonstratively, stands connected with the purpose, which cannot fail; bound up with the everlasting covenant, which is ordered in all things and sure. “The word of the Lord endureth for ever, and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”

8. *I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.*

We need not be confined to special seasons when a summons is given; but, at all times, and in every place, we may “continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” When your hands are measuring out, your goods, when they are pushing the plane, or driving the nail, when you are driving the plough, or threshing the corn, if you are speeding along the iron way, or walking among the cornfields, your heart may have fellowship with him—

“Who is within no walls confined.
But habiteth the humble mind,”—

Who counts all places holy where men are holy, and all spots suitable places for prayer when the heart is in a prayerful frame. My soul, wait thou upon God in thy daily calling, and think not that thou canst ever approach him at an unseasonable hour, or lift up thy cry to him when he is otherwise engaged, so that he cannot attend to thy petition.

9-15.

Spurgeon never commented on these verses.

1 Timothy 3

1. *This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*

Any man who desireth to oversee the church of God, and to be in the midst of the people as a shepherd, desireth a good work. He will bring himself great anxiety labor and, travail, but the work is honorable, and has so large a spiritual reward that a man is wise to choose it, and to give his whole life to it.

2. *A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;*

He must be apt to teach. He must have a way of making plain what he means, and of winning attention, so that men may be willing to listen to him. Our Lord had this grand capacity in the highest degree. He could bring the sublimest truths down to the level of his hearers' comprehension. He knew how, with a divine simplicity, to tell a story that would win even a child's attention; and though the truth be spake was such that archangels might well marvel at it, yet he put it into such a form that the little children gathered around him, and the common people heard him gladly. Aptness to teach this is what we want. Pray ye, my brethren, the Lord of the harvest to send us many who have this choice gift. The pulpit, the Sunday-school, and every form of Christian service need earnest workers who have the power of translating their thoughts into the language of those with whom they come in contact, so that they may be interested and impressed.

3-5. *Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the*

church of God?)

A man who cannot govern his children can never be anything but a rear-rank soldier of Christ, a poor, feeble Christian at best.

6. *Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.*

If I knew that some young man here present would be greatly owned of God in the future, and become in future a prince in our Israel, if by lifting up of this finger I could screen him from fierce criticism, misrepresentation, and abuse, I would not do it, because, severe as the ordeal might be to him, I am persuaded it is needful that he should pass through it in order to make him able to bear the giddy heights of the position for which God intends him. Joseph on the throne of Egypt, I know not what he might have been if first of all he had not been laid in the stocks. His feet learned to stand fast on a throne through having been set fast in a dungeon. His gold chain was worn without pride because he had worn a chain of iron; and he was fit to be the ruler of princes because he had himself been a servant among prisoners. Through his trial God gave him power to bear power, and this is a far rarer gift than the power to endure oppression and contempt.

7. *Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.*

If we are to be useful to our fellow-men, we must deserve their esteem. We are not to curry favor with them by lowering our principles to gain their approbation, but, on the contrary, we are to win their respect by sheer force of unbending holiness, that so we may have power over them for their good. We are to win influence over our fellow-men by an upright character, and a generous behavior; so that if they wish to speak against us, they may find no matter for accusation except it be concerning our zeal for the Lord our God. Oh, that our church-members were all men of spotless character! Oh, that all professors were well reported of! The church is injured in her efforts for the conversion of the world by the inconsistencies of certain of her members.

8. *Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;*

If the lust of wealth enters into the heart, it rots it to the core. The apostle James cries, “Your gold and your silver are cankered”: truly, the man becomes cancered and cankered too.

9-13. *Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

Stephen is first heard of as a distributor of the alms of the church to needy widows. He exercised what was virtually, if not nominally, the deacon’s office. Being grave, and not double-tongued, and holding the mystery of the faith in a good conscience, he was well fitted for his work. Doubtless he used the office of a deacon well, and so purchased to himself a good degree, and great boldness in the faith, which is in Christ Jesus. Although the onerous duty of serving tables might well have excused him from other service, we soon find him, full of faith and power, doing great wonders and miracles among the people; and not even content with that, we see him defending the faith against a synagogue of subtle philosophical deniers of the truth. These, with their allies, made the valiant deacon the object of their attack, and he at once rose to be an irresistible witness for the gospel. Stephen the deacon became Stephen the preacher.

14, 15. *These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God,*

The Church is called “the house of God”; and why? Because, first, it had God for its Architect,—it is not built after man’s plan. The tabernacle in the

wilderness was framed after the pattern which God gave to Moses in the mount; and, verily, Christ's Church is built after God's own model; it is not molded according to man's idea, it is not shaped according to his option; the will of God, and his will alone, has been followed in the construction of his own house, which is the Church.

Which is the church of the living God

There is a synagogue of Satan, and there is a church of God. There are churches so-called which are not of God, though they take upon themselves his name; but what an honor it is to be one of the assembly of God, to be one of those whom God has chosen, whom God has called, whom God has quickened, whom God has sanctified, whom God loves and calls his own!

The pillar and ground of the truth.

We, beloved, who are of the house of God, and of the Church of God, are the maintainers and supporters, instrumentally, of God's truth on the earth. Come, then, let me stir you up to do your duty; let me beg of you who love God's truth not to leave it to itself. Perhaps you imagine that God's truth, being mighty, must prevail without your assistance. It is true, it must and will, but, then, God has said that, if you belong to his Church, you are to be the pillar and ground of the truth. To leave God's truth to shift for itself, is as bad as to leave your own children to provide for themselves. True, the great decrees of destiny shall be carried out, and our Savior's kingdom shall be established; but it shall be by means. God has honored you by choosing you to be the maintainers, the testifiers, the pillar and ground of the truth. I will endeavor to arouse you, then, by one or two exhortations, to be faithful to this your solemn duty.

16. *And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:*

When he says "without controversy," I suppose he means that there ought to be no controversy about these facts, though controversies have arisen concerning them, and always will, since the most self-evident truth will always find self-evident fools to contradict it. He means that, in the church of God, at any rate, there is no question about these fundamentals. Outside of the church these

statements are denied, but inside the house of God no one ever questions them for a moment; and he who does so is by that very act proven to have no part nor lot in the matter.

God was manifest in the flesh,

What a mystery is this! A mystery of mysteries! God the invisible was manifest; God the spiritual dwelt in flesh; God the infinite, uncontained, boundless, was manifest in the flesh.

Justified in the Spirit,

The Spirit of God bore witness to Christ, and justified all his claims at the time of his baptism, when out of the excellent glory there appeared the form of a dove, and a voice cried out of heaven, “This is my beloved Son.” That same Spirit justified him audibly again in his transfiguration; but silently, and yet more evidently, the seal of God was always on him, everywhere the Spirit witnessed to him. Only blind eyes, blinded by hate, refused to see the divine light which hung about his every word and act, as radiance enrobes a star. Above all our Lord’s claims were justified by the Spirit in his resurrection, when he was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.” Nor less so when, after forty days, he was received up into glory, and the Spirit of God justified all that Christ had said, by coming down like a rushing mighty wind and cloven tongues of fire, and resting upon his disciples.

Seen of angels,

Angels had waited to see the Lord, patiently gazing on the mercy-seat. There had been rumors in heaven of this mystery of the manifold wisdom of God, but they had not understood it; and it is now in Christ that the mystery of incarnate God has been revealed to them. If I may so say, the brightness of the Godhead had confounded even the angels; they were not able to see God, but when God came and manifested himself in the flesh, then God was seen of angels.

preached unto the Gentiles,

Until Christ came, nothing was “preached to the Gentiles.” They were accounted dogs, and few were the crumbs that fell to them from the master’s table; but after our Lord had ascended on high he was proclaimed to the Gentiles. To a Jew especially this would seem a very strange thing. The Jew thought that if the Gentile perished, it was but a matter of course; but for the Gentiles to be visited with the gospel was strange indeed.

Believed on in the world,

When the humble preachers went out first to tell of Jesus, their story was so strange you could not imagine that any would believe it. And then the doctrines that they taught were so contrary to all the prejudices of flesh and blood, so humbling to human pride, so insulting to all our self-esteem, that it was not probable that men would accept them. And the world, too, what a world it was! It was steeped up to its throat in cruelty, in vice, in luxury, in sins infamous and unmentionable, and was it likely that a pure Savior, with a perfect doctrine like his, would find followers? But he did; he was “believed on in the world.” Why, I think the first preachers must have been ready to leap for joy when they found that men believed them. If I had been Peter, I should scarce have slept for joy for many a night if I had found three thousand willing to believe my testimony, and willing to be baptized into Christ! And Paul—oh, methinks, with all his sorrows, he must have been a very happy man—must have been struck with wonder to see that though he went into idolatrous lands to tell this new, and strange, and incredible story, yet in every place there were found men or women who received it joyfully.

Received up into glory.

He was so received because his work is finished. He would never have gone into his glory if he had not finished all his toil. He would have accepted no reward had he not fully earned it. My soul, believe thou that Christ is received up into glory; that will let thee know that thou art resting in a finished work, an atonement which has put away all sin, a satisfaction which has made all believers accepted in the Beloved. He has gone into glory, thus he is personally rewarded; and moreover, he has thus representatively taken possession of all that he has purchased.

1 Timothy 4

1. *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;*

There are seducing spirits abroad that would deceive, if it were possible, the very elect; therefore, I entreat you be not beguiled by their exceeding craftiness. These devices of men and doctrines of devils are only so many sieves, by which the Lord will separate the chaff from the wheat, and make it to be known who are his elect and who are not.

2. *Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;*

A healthy conscience is tender as a raw wound, which fears a touch; but some men's consciences are covered with a thick skin, and are devoid of feeling. Certain sinners have a conscience seared as with a hot iron, and this brings with it that horrible peace which is the preface of eternal damnation.

Around us are persons who have a peace which Satan preserves. "When a strong man armed keepeth his house, his goods are in peace." When Satan is in full possession of a man, then no disturbing thoughts come in, and the sinful heart is well content. "They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men they may even die at peace, for the Psalmist complains, "there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm." Satan has filled them with "a strong delusion to believe a lie," and so in peace they perish; they go willingly to destruction, like sheep to the slaughter.

3, 4. *Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats,*

which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving:

The Mosaic law attached great importance to meats and drinks: the Christian religion attaches none. The apostle Peter was shown by the vision of a sheet let down from heaven, not only that all nations were now to receive the gospel message, but that all kinds of food were now clean, and that all the prohibitions which had formerly been laid upon them for legal purposes were now once for all withdrawn. A Christian may, if he pleases, put himself under restrictions as to these matters. You will remember that the apostle Paul says, "I know and am persuaded of the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean." I wot our apostle was tender of weak consciences; but he could expostulate with the brethren somewhat thus, "If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye dogmatize—touch not this, taste not that, handle not the other—and all about things which perish with the using?"

5. *For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*

There is no action which is lawful, however common-place it maybe but may be sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If the intense desire of our spirit shall be that we may glorify God as long as we are in this body, we shall find ways and means of accomplishing our object, and the Holy Spirit will help our infirmities.

6. *If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.*

I should like to hear all our pulpits sounding with the old-fashioned doctrine of John Owen, and of such men as Bunyan, and Charnock, and Goodwin, and those men of olden time who knew the truth and dared to preach it fully. Now where find we such? We labor and we strive, we dig, we toil, we seek to be something, and we end in being nothing. And so it must be as long as hands are weak and knees are feeble, and so also must this be as long as good doctrine is denied us,

and truth is kept back in the ministry. Feed God's children well; give them comfort; give them much to feed upon of the sweet things of the kingdom of God; and then they will grow strong, then they will begin to work.

7. *But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.*

The curious man is not content with simplicities, but must pry into mysteries. He would if he could climb to the Eternal Throne, and read between those folded leaves and break the seven seals of the mysterious book of destiny. Our apostle has many things in his writings which are hard to be understood, yet he uttered them because of the Spirit, and you never meet with any attempt in the apostle's writing as you do in the preaching of some ministers, as you do in the conversation of some professors, to reconcile predestination with free will. He was quite content to preach to men as free agents, and exhort them to repent, quite willing to speak of God as working in us to will and do of his good pleasure, while we also work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Paul was never curious to find out where the lines of truth met, he was perfectly content to take his doctrine from his Master's spirit, and leave the old wives fables and endless genealogies and disputings, and questionings, to those who had no better guests to entertain.

8. *For bodily exercise profiteth little:*

Physical training is of some service; attention to it is not sinful nor to be condemned; it is of some use and has its proper place, but still it has no very eminent position in the Christian system, it occupies a place far in the background in the teaching of Christ and his apostles; it is but a minor part of a complete education.

But godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is

The religion of our Lord Jesus Christ neither undervalues nor overvalues this present life. It does not sneer at this life as though it were nothing; on the contrary, it ennobles it, and shows the relation which it has to the higher and

eternal life.

God hath given to none of the unconverted ones any promise of the life that now is. They are like squatters on a common, who pitch their tents, and by the sufferance of the lord of the manor may remain there for awhile, but at a moment's notice you must up tents and away. But the Christian hath the promise of the life that now is; that is to say, he has the freehold of it; it is life given to him of God, and he really enjoys it, and has an absolute certainty about it; in fact, the life that now is has become to the Christian a foretaste of the life to come.

"The promise" of the life that now is, its real and highest beauty and excellence, consists in peace of mind, peace with God, contentment, and happiness of spirit.

and of that which is to come.

The godly man, unless Christ shall come, will die as others die, as to the matter of outward fact, but his death will be very different in its essence and meaning. He will pass gently out of this would into the world to come, and then he will begin to realize the promise which godliness gave him; for he will enter then, nay, he has entered now, upon an eternal life far other than that which belongs to other men. The Christian's life shall never be destroyed: "Because I live, ye shall live also," says Christ. There is no fear of the Christian's ever growing aged in heaven, or of his powers failing him. Eternal youth shall be to those who wear the unfading crown of life.the promise" of the life that now is, its real and highest beauty and excellence, consists in peace of mind, peace with God, contentment, and happiness of spirit

9. *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation.*

Paul has four of these faithful sayings. The first occurs in 1 Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The second is our text. The third is in 2 Timothy 2:12, "It is a faithful saying, if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; "and the fourth is in Titus 3:8, "This is a faithful saying, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." We may trace a connection between these faithful sayings.

The first one lays the foundation of our eternal salvation in the free grace of God, as shown to us in the mission of the great Redeemer. The next affirms the double blessedness which we obtain through this salvation—the blessings of the upper and nether springs—of time and of eternity.

The third shows one of the duties to which the chosen people are called; we are ordained to suffer for Christ with the promise that "if we suffer, we shall also reign with him." The last sets forth the active form of Christian service, bidding us diligently to maintain good works. Thus we have the root of salvation in free grace; next, the privileges of that salvation in the life which now is, and in that which is to come; and we have also the two great branches of suffering with Christ and serving with Christ, loaded with the fruits of the Spirit. Let us treasure up these faithful sayings. Let them be the guides of our life, our comfort,

10. *For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God,*

We cannot tell all that will yet happen in this world, but one thing we know—God will always be "the living God." It is probable that once powerful nations will be utterly destroyed, and that there: will be terrible disasters beyond anything that has yet been experienced; we know that the present dispensation will utterly pass away, and that "the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed:" but this fact is sure, that he, who has been their dwelling-place of his people in all generations, will be the dwelling-place of his people in all the generations that are yet to come. There will never be a funeral knell to tell us that our great Lord is dead. There will be no need for weeping amongst the blessed spirits above because he, who was their Creator, Protector, Preserver, and Friend, has ceased to be, for he ever will be "the living God."

Who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

An actual separation is made by grace, is carried on in the work of sanctification, and will be completed in that day when the heavens shall be on fire, and the saints shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air; and in that last tremendous day, he shall divide the nations as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats, and then there shall be, a great gulf fixed, across which the ungodly cannot go to the righteous, neither shall the righteous approach the wicked.

11, 12. *These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

Brother ministers, if we are unbelieving, we in our unbelief do not sin so cheaply as our people: we have more time to study the word, and therefore we have, or ought to have, more acquaintance with it. We are more familiar with divine things, and ought to be more richly filled with their faith-creating spirit. If the Lord has been pleased to make us under-shepherds over his people, we are bound to be ensamples to the flock. Our high position demands of us the exhibition of a greater degree of grace than we can expect from common believers, who are God's dear people, but are not set apart to be leaders.

The same line of argument will apply in due proportion to each servant of our Lord Jesus: according to their measure of grace more is expected of some than of others. You, dear sisters, who teach young people should remember that they watch you, and they expect to see in you a bright example; and, what is more, God, who has placed you in the position of teachers, or of mothers, intends that there should be in you, by his grace, something that others may look up to, that the young beginners may learn from you. Take heed that they never learn unbelief from your doubtings.

13, 14. *Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.*

We do not believe in that fiction of apostolical succession by the laying on of hands of men; but we do believe in that glorious truth of apostolical succession —the laying on of the hands of God, when he himself calleth out one by one from the midst of mankind—men who shall grasp the standard when the standard-bearer falls—men who shall bear the great two-edged sword, and fight God's battles when those who fought them before have gone down to their graves triumphant.

15. *Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.*

Let us give to the things of God our best, our ripest, our most careful, our most intense thought. I pray you, do not take religion at second hand from what I tell you, or somebody else tells you; but think it over, and give it your principal thoughts. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the word of God. The thoughtful Christian is the growing Christian. Remember, the service Of God deserves our very best consideration and endeavor. We are poor things at our best, but we ought to give the Lord nothing short of our principal powers. God would not have us serve him heedlessly, but he would have us use all the brain and intellect and mind that we have in studying and practising the things of God. "Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace." "Meditate upon these things. Give thyself wholly to them." If ever your mind is more clear and active at one time than at another, then sow the principal wheat of godly contemplation and gracious devotion. If you feel more fresh and more inclined to think at one time of the day than at another, let your whole mind at once go forth towards the best things.

16. *Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*

As many as are the real called and sent servants of God, are not the authors of their message; but they first hear it from the Master, and they speak it to the people, and they see ever before their eyes these solemn words—"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee," and they hear behind them this awful threatening—"If thou warn them not they shall perish, but their blood will I require at thine hand." Oh! that ye might see written in letters of fire before you this day the words of the prophet—"O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord;" for as far as our ministry is true and untainted by error, it is God's Word, and it hath the same right and claim to your belief as if God himself should speak it from the top of Sinai, instead of speaking it through the humble ministry of the Word of God.

1 Timothy 5

1-4. *Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity. Honour widows that are widows indeed. But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.*

Many Christian women will have done well if they have carried out home duties. She was a holy woman upon whose grave they placed this epitaph, “She made home happy.”

5, 6. *Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.*

Too many in this luxurious city are only clothes-horses for tailors and milliners, or shall I call them patent digesters, dissolving daily great store of good meat and drink, and so on. Their one question in the morning is, “How shall we amuse ourselves today?” Alas, this is true of women as well as men, for the Scripture saith, “She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.”

7, 8. *And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless. But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

A moral fault may be a denial of the faith, and may make a man worse than if he had never professed to believe at all. God save us from an unholy life!

9-16. *Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not. I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan. If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.*

Happy is the church that abounds in Christian matrons and younger women willing to be serviceable for Christ!

17, 18. *Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.*

What a cheer it is to us when we get a letter from one who has found the Lord through our teaching; and better still, when face to face we meet one who has trusted the Savior through our poor instrumentality! Those who are sowers of the seed know what a joy it is to see it spring up. Who are the people who cause us needless depression? Who are those who withhold needful encouragement? Why, those who do not come out and tell what grace has done for them. For the sake of those who labor among you in word and doctrine, I beseech you come forward. Common gratitude should lead you to let us know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord.

19. *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.*

Two or three witnesses were sufficient to establish a case in a court of law. A thing that cannot be proved by three honest men as witnesses, probably cannot be proved by thirty; and if three men join to testify to a lie, probably thirty will not speak the truth.

20, 21. *Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.*

Partiality has been too often shown to rich and great men, but the King of the last and best of monarchy deals out even-handed justice, to the delight of the poor and despised.

22. *Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure.*

There were certain upstarts who wrongly thought that they could preach, and there were others who thought that they could rule in the churches. These persons probably gained a few or many partisans to support their claims. There were some of their relatives, in the church, who thought a great deal of their sons, or brothers, or uncles, or cousins, or there were friends who heard some man speak, on a certain occasion, with considerable fluency, and being unwise, they judged him to be man of master-mind, and would have put him into the front rank of the army at once if the power to do so had rested with them. Paul tells Timothy, whom he had sent to exercise a general oversight over the officers and members of the church, not to be in a hurry to lay his hands upon these men, so as to endorse their claim, but to lot them wait awhile until they were tried and tested; because, if he allowed them to take office in the church, and they committed faults or follies, he would be responsible for them, and everybody would say, "We wonder that Timothy should have sent out such men as these." So he was bidden to be cautious, lest he should become, in any way, "a partaker of other men's sins."

23, 24. *Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities. Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.*

There shall come a day, the day for which all other days were made, when the books shall be opened, and every man shall give an account of the deeds done in the body, whether they have been good or whether they have been evil; and, further, our Savior said, "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Can we bear to have it all known? Yet known it shall be, written as athwart the sky, when those we have deceived and deluded shall discover what we were, and we shall wake up to everlasting shame and contempt unless we find shelter in the droning sacrifice, and be washed in the precious blood of Christ.

1 Timothy 6

1, 2. *Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.*

The chapter opens with advice to servants, who then were slaves. Their earthly life was wretched indeed, but the apostle bids them live, not for this present life, but for the eternal life. Inasmuch as they could glorify God by continuing to bear the yoke, and would not glorify him by rising in insurrection against their masters, he bade them remain in their position until better times might come. He would have them by divine grace fulfill the relationship in which they found themselves. Christianity is the deadly foe of slavery, but it took time to destroy it, and in the meanwhile believing slaves were bidden to glorify God in their station. And this is what the gospel says to every one of us: Honour your station by glorifying God in it.

You see how much of the Epistle is taken up with the affairs of ordinary life, matters of holy practice; so let our preaching be, and let Christian people learn to receive joyfully such instruction. God will assuredly bless it, not only to its own great end of promoting holiness, but also as the means of convincing men of sin wherein they deviate from these blessed precepts, and so by conviction of sin leading them to feel their need of a Savior, and thus incidentally driving them to the cross where all hopes of salvation must alone be fixed.

3-5. *If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is*

according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

We are overdone with these canker-worms at this hour. Brethren, you can go and interfere in all the controversies of the day if you like, but beware of the consequences. You can be a party politician if you like, or you can be a man of culture, loving speculation better than revelation, if you think fit; but, if you take my advice, you will do nothing of the sort, but "lay hold on eternal life." I like that expression of Mr. Wesley's preachers, when they were asked to interfere in this or that political struggle, they replied, "Our work is to win souls, and we give ourselves to it." Oh that churches would listen to this just now! They are going in for amusements, and the church is vying with the theater. Oh that we would lay hold on eternal life, and seek the salvation of men. Eternal life in our churches would soon cast out the rubbish which is now defiling them. Jesus in the churches would purify the temple of the puppets, as once he cleansed it of the traders. We need to receive anew this conviction: that our one great business here below is to lay hold on eternal life, first making our own calling and election sure, and then seeking to bring others to Christ. Other questions compared with this are mere debates as to tweedledum and tweedledee. Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth until they break each other in their anger; but we strive only for the kingdom of heaven, which lies not in trivial things. It is ours to lay hold upon eternal life; as for the rest, the will of the Lord be done!

6. *But godliness with contentment is great gain.*

The Lord teaches those who are really his people that "godliness with contentment is great gain;" and, therefore, for Christ's sake, they can afford to despise and lose all other so-called "gain." "But," says one, "I don't know where we should be if we were so scrupulous and exact as that." I can tell you where you would be, you would be walking in the light as God is in the light, and you would have fellowship with him; and you would be no loser by acting thus, but you would be a gainer all round, for Christ has assured you that no one shall leave houses, or lands, or husband, or wife, or children, for the kingdom's sake,

who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting. If you cannot lose for Christ, you have already lost Christ, for he said, “Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” He who loves the world better than Christ loves not Christ at all. God save us from being of that character!

7. *For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.*

Success in life, without God, is always vain; a man may be a millionaire without God, but what is that? He may be reported in the newspapers to have died worth a million, when, in fact, he was not worth a brass button. He was put into a coffin, lowered into the grave, but; he was himself worth nothing at all. He could take nothing with him. Even the silver plate on the coffin did not belong to him. If anyone had dug open the grave, and taken the plate away, he could not have said, “Leave that alone, it is mine.” “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out.” So life is a failure if it is only used in amassing gold.

You have, some of you, to thank God indeed for what he has done for you in providential things, and even those that have least have got more than they deserve. Let them recollect that; and however poor we may be, we shall never be as poor as we were when we were born. We brought nothing into this world. Come as low as we may, we shall have enough to get us into heaven, depend upon that—just enough manna to last until we get across Jordan, and then we shall eat of the old corn of the land that floweth with milk and honey.

8. *And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*

I have known persons, who have possessed quite enough to guarantee to them according to all human probabilities that they would never lack food and raiment as long as they live, yet they were troubled. Why? Well they were losing some of their money; but why did that trouble them? It was because they had not obeyed that injunction of the apostle, “Having food and raiment let us be therewith content.”

9. *But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into*

many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

It is very difficult for man to have much money running through his hands without some of it sticking. It is very sticky stuff; and when it once sticks to the hands, they are not clean in the sight off the Lord. Unless a man is able to use money without abusing it, accepting it as a talent lent to him, and not as a treasure given to him, it will very soon happen that, the more money he has, the more troubles he will have. Just in proportion as our substance is increased, our daily cares will be increased; and on that very soil which we most covet will grow the thorns and thistles which will make our bed uneasy by night, and our death-bed hard to lie on when we come to die; so beware of covetousness, brethren; for, otherwise, you will very soon fall into trouble and fear.

10. *For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

He whose life's object is to accumulate money is not a Christian. No man can serve two masters; and if Mammon be his master Christ is not his Master. To prosper in business with the sincere desire of using everything for the honor and glory of God is laudable and proper; but to make this the end rather than the means is a horrible prostitution and debasement of our energies. To live for this world is to be dead to the world to come. The apostle bids us "lay hold on eternal life" rather than on this life: to gain riches of grace rather than riches of gold.

11. *But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.*

A man that is very careful of his life will not remain in a house where fever has been rife. He looks to the drains, and all other sanitary arrangements, and if these are hopelessly bad he quits the house. No measure of cheapness or convenience will make him risk his life. Have you heard of men in their senses who will hunt for dens of fever and cholera, and wantonly enter them? On the contrary, visitors are scared from a city or district by the mere rumor of cholera or other infectious disease. You who profess to be men of God must flee these things which are

injurious to purity, to truth, to godliness, to communion with God, for these are detrimental to your best life.

Then the apostle tells Timothy to seek after everything that would promote his eternal life. He says, “Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness”: seek after that which will exercise and develop your highest life. Frequent those hills of holiness where the atmosphere is bracing for your new-born spirit.

12. *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life*

It is evident that if Timothy lays hold on eternal life, he will have to fight for it; and that if he has to fight, he can only fight by laying hold upon eternal life with tenacious grip. Every Christian man is a soldier, and no man will war a good warfare unless he lays hold upon eternal life with all his heart and soul. A man may fight the battles of earth with the life of earth, but our warfare is of a different kind; “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Timothy had been baptized, and probably there had been a great number of persons to encourage or watch him as he came forward to confess Christ. This, then, was a double reason why he should hold fast that on which he had laid hold. O you that have named the name of Christ, and have put him on by that wonderful symbol of death and burial and resurrection, “Lay hold on eternal life.” Do not play at baptism and the Lord’s supper. Let these be stern, nay, sweet realities to you. Lay hold, not on the symbol along, but on what the symbol means.

13-15. *I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;*

Christ sacrificed everything for us. He gave himself for us. He laid hold on things eternal; as for anything here below, he let it slip by for our sakes. Eternity was ever pressing upon the heart of Christ; for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame. Therefore, if thou be a Christian, professing to follow Christ, lay hold on eternal life, and let this fill thy grasp.

That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

Only lowly reverence may come before the king himself when he sits clothed in his robes of majesty. In our case, the king before whom we come is the highest of all monarchs, the King of kings, the Lord of lords. Emperors are but the shadows of his imperial power. They call themselves kings by right divine, but what divine right have they? Common sense laughs their pretensions to scorn. The Lord alone hath divine right, and to him only doth the kingdom belong. He is the blessed and only potentate. They are but nominal kinds, to be set up and put down at the will of men, or the decree of providence, but he is Lord alone, the Prince of the kings of the earth.

16. *Who only hath immortality,*

If we are inclined to grieve because everything around us changes, our consolation will be found in turning to our unchanging God. If we lament the ills of mortality, it will be wise for us to turn to him “who only hath immortality.” If our earthly joys fade and die, it is a blessed thing for us to be able to go to the fountain of undying joy, and there to drink deep draughts of bliss, which shall cause us to forget our misery.

Dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see, to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

The things which are seen are stayed up by the invisible God. This outward

visible universe has no power to stand for a single instant if he does not keep it in being. By him all things consist. There are no forces apart from God's power, no existences apart from his will. He bears up the pillars of the universe. He alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. He maketh Arcturus, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south. Foolish are those philosophers who think that they can reach the essence and soul from which visible things were evolved, unless they bow before the invisible God. He is the foundation of creation, the fountain and source of being, the root and basement of existence.

17-19. *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

As the alchemist was said to transmute brass and copper into gold (though he did no such thing), so there is a real alchemy which can sublime gold and silver into everlasting treasure. These talents are not to be despised, but put out to interest for the Lord. They can be laid by where no rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal; they' can be traded with in a heavenly market, and turned to everlasting gains. We can use them for helping on the work of the Lord, and by distribution to the poor and needy. I would that all men at this hour abounded in almsgiving, but specially those who are followers of the loving Jesus. Regard your transactions from the standpoint of eternity. Weigh what you do, not as it may be thought of by men of the world, but as it will be judged by yourself when you behold in the heavenly country the face of him you love. I do not want you to have to say when you come to die, "I have had large possessions, but I have been a bad steward. I have had a competence, and I have wasted my Master's goods. All I have done with my wealth was to furnish my house well, perhaps to buy expensive pictures, and to allow myself luxuries which did me more harm than good." I hope, on the contrary, you will have to say, "I am saved by grace alone; but that grace enabled me to consecrate my substance, and put it to the best uses. I can render up my stewardship without fear. I did not live for the fleeting life which is now over, but for the life everlasting."

20, 21. *O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace be with thee. Amen.*

It is godliness that we want—the living of the soul with God, and in God, and to God. We need a holy fear of God, a sacred sense of God, a true delight in God. We want less of man and more of God. Less of mere creed-repeating, and more of vital faith in God; less following of men, and more following of God in Christ Jesus. More of union with God, living in God, and likeness to God. Oh that he would work this in us!

2 TIMOTHY

2 Timothy 1

1. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus.*

Paul takes high ground. He is not an apostle by the will of the Church, but an apostle by the will of God. God's will is the great motive power in the Church of God. Some talk a great deal about man's will. What think you of God's will, the will of the Almighty? Surely that shall stand. Paul felt that he had that at the back of him. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." Hence he always speaks very boldly. He never asks leave of anybody. If he is an apostle by the will of God, he exercises his office without fear.

2. *To Timothy, my dearly beloved son:*

Son in the faith. When all the ties of natural descent shall be forgotten. sonship in Christ will continue. I do not doubt that in heaven Timothy is. still Paul's son; Paul is still father to Timothy, for the relation is of the Spirit.

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I think I have called upon you to notice that when Paul writes to a church, it is

“Grace and peace.” Whenever he writes to a minister, it is “Grace, mercy, and peace.” I have sometimes wondered whether we ministers need mercy more titan other people, and I suppose that we do, or else the Apostle would not have said, “Grace, mercy, and peace.” Oh! if a minister gets to heaven, it will be a wonder. His responsibilities are so great. “Who is sufficient for these things?” It will be a marvelous display of mercy if any of us shall be able to say at last, “I am clear of the blood of all men”; for we have not only our own blood, but the blood of others to look to in this matter.

3. *I thank God whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day;*

For this Paul thanks God. He never forgot to pray for Timothy, and it is a matter of thankfulness. When we feel moved to pray, though it be for another, the spirit of prayer is essentially the same, whatever its object; and we ought to be thankful when we feel continually able to pray for a friend.

“I thank God.” says he, and he says that he had served God with a pure conscience all his days. So he had, but it was a blind conscience. At first, when he was a Pharisee, he still served God, though he then persecuted ignorantly the people of God. Oh! but it is a good thing sincerely to follow after God. May we be helped to do so. “I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.”

4. *Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy;*

Paul had seen Timothy’s tears when he parted from him. He remembered, perhaps, his tears when under conviction of sin, his tears of joy when he found the Savior, and the tears he shed in his early preaching, when the gracious youth touched the hearts of others because he so evidently spoke out of his own heart. I suppose that Timothy was very tender-hearted, and that he had been grieved because of Paul’s many afflictions; and, on his part, the apostle greatly missed his dearly-beloved son in the faith.

5. *When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee,*

which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

Grace does not run in the blood, but it often runs side by side with it. The "grandmother Lois" and the "mother Eunice" had the true grace of saving faith dwelling in them, and Paul was persuaded that it dwelt in the son and grandson Timothy.

There is no transmigration of souls, but there is a kind of transmigration of faith, as if the very form and shape of faith, which was in Lois and Eunice, afterwards appeared in Timothy. Truly, there are certain idiosyncrasies which may pass from some Christian people to others; and when those idiosyncrasies are of a high and noble kind, it is a great mercy to see them reproduced in children and children's children. "I thought I heard your mother speak," said one, when she heard a Christian woman talking of the Savior, "you speak in just the way in which she used to tell out her experience, and describe the love of Christ."

Timothy's father was a Greek, and probably a heathen, but his child was happy in having a venerable grandmother, so often the dearest of all relatives to a little child. He had also a gracious mother, once a devout Jewess, and afterwards also a firmly believing Christian, who made it her daily pleasure to teach her own dear child the Word of the Lord. O dear mothers you have a very sacred trust reposed in you by God! He hath in effect said to you, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." You are called to equip the future man of God, that he may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. If God spares you, you may live to hear that pretty boy speak to thousands, and you will have the sweet reflection in your heart that the quiet teachings of the nursery led the man to love his God and serve him. Those who think that a woman detained at home by her little family is doing nothing, think the reverse of what is true. Scarcely can the godly mother quit her home for a place of worship, but dream not that she is lost to the work of the church; far from it, she is doing the best possible service for her Lord.

6. *Wherefore I put thee in remembrance.*

Paul had been speaking of his own remembrance of Timothy, and of Timothy's faith, and now he says, "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance"—

That thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

The best of fires need stirring sometimes; and the best gift of God, even the sacred fire of the Holy Spirit, may sometimes burn low in the heart; so that we have need to stir up the gift of God that is within us. There are some brethren, also, who have more God-given gifts within them than they know of. They have never searched for them, so they allow them to lie hidden away unobserved and useless. We have need to stir up our gifts well as our graces, end to use to God's glory all the powers with which he has entrusted us.

7. *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

Neither Paul, nor Timothy had a craven spirit. They were none of them afraid. God had taught them tits truth, and they knew it, and they held it, defying all opposition.

What a boon this is to all who can truly say, with Paul, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind!"

8. *Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner:*

Timothy, never be ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and never be ashamed of Paul when he is put in prison for the sake of the gospel; but ask to partake, not only of the gospel, and of the power of it, but even of the afflictions which come for its sake, for this is one of the highest honors that can be put upon us, that we may suffer with God's saints for the truth's sake.

Were people ashamed of Paul? Oh! yes. The great Apostle, because he was persecuted, found himself despised by some of the very people who owed their souls to him. It is the lot of those who are faithful to Christ to find even good men sometimes turning against them.

But what of that? They are responsible to their Master, not to their fellow-

servants.

Yet it is a hard thing when any come to be ashamed of you—ashamed of you, though you know that you have done right. I do not wonder that he puts it even to Timothy, “Be not thou, therefore, ashamed of the testimony, of our Lord, nor of me, his prisoner.” Some of us know What it is to have trained and brought up these about us, who were to us what Timothy was to Paul, who have been ashamed of us, and of the testimony of our Lord.

But be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God:

You will want the power of God to do it, and mind you do it. Take your full share in whatever affliction the gospel brings upon Christians.

9. *Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling.*

Salvation comes first, and calling afterwards; at least, so it is in the great plan of redemption. We are saved by the death of Christ before we are effectually called by his grace. The great work of our salvation was wrought for us on Calvary, and now we are made to know and to partake of that salvation by the effectual galling of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel.

Not according to our work, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

How plain it is that he earnestly believed in the eternal election of believers—in their being in Christ, and in their possession of grace in Christ.

“Grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” God’s love to his people is not a thing of yesterday. He loved them before the world was made, and he will love them when the world has ceased to be.

What a blessed doctrine this is! Some people cannot endure even to hear or read of it, but it is full of comfort and joy for the Spirit-taught people of God.

10, 11. *But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.*

How Paul gloried in this triple divine appointment! He commenced this Epistle by writing, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God;” and here he says of the gospel, “whereunto I am appointed a preacher.” I see that some tradesmen put up a notice over their shops stating that they are so-and-so “by appointment to Her Majesty,” but Paul had the highest honor under heaven in being “appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.”

12. *For which cause I also suffer these things:*

And I expect that his eyes glanced round on the walls of his dungeon, and that he rattled the chains that bound his hands to those of the soldiers who had him in their charge.

Paul knew that grace could keep his soul, but I think that he here means that he could keep his own gospel. Paul had kept it, kept the faith, but he committed it now into the hand of the greater One, who would keep it when every apostle was dead, and every faithful witness had passed away.

13. *Hold fast the form of sound words,*

Many say they have no creeds, and there is hardly an Epistle in which there is not a distinct mention of a creed.

Which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

Hold fast the truth. Hold fast the very form and shape of it. If you are to keep the life that is in an egg, you must not even break the shell**.** Take care of it all, and take care of it all the more when with specious reasoning they say, “We will hold the same truth, only in a different form.” Why a different form at all, if they do

not wish to hold a different doctrine altogether? Nay, my brethren, especially you that are like young Timothy, take this passage to heart. “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

14. *That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.*

This is what we want. If the Holy Ghost be in us, we shall never trifle with the truth. He is the lover and revealer of truth, and we shall press the doctrines of the Word of God and the Word of God itself nearer and nearer to our hearts in portion as the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

15. *This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me;*

What! turned away from Paul? Some people think it is an awful thing because certain people turn away from a minister of Christ. It is not an awful thing at all, except for them. Paul stands fast; even he, the bravest of the brave, and they all turn aside from him. What of that? Does Paul flinch? Nay, not he. “This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me.”

Of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

Two men who ought to have known better**.** Paul evidently fixed his eye upon them—more bitter than others, more perverse, more cruel, more willfully guilty in turning aside from him.

Paul mentions these who turned away from him, for their unfaithfulness evidently grieved him sorely; but he also mentions another case of quite a different sort:

16. *The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain:*

We read of various corporations spending a great deal of money in buying chains of office for their mayors; but this chain, worn by the apostle in his prison-cell at Rome, was far more valuable than any of them.

What an eternal honor it will be to him, and how and it is that anyone should have been ashamed of his fetters when he was so bravely suffering for Christ's sake! There was more value in those chains on Paul's wrists than in all the chains that were ever worn on the necks of the great ones of this world.

17. *But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.*

You could not tell in Rome where a prisoner was. The registers were not open to investigation. You had to go from prison to prison, and fee the guards to get admission, or to be told who might be there, and Onesiphorus was determined to find out Paul. I suppose that he went to the Mamertine, a dungeon in which some of us have been—one dungeon under the bottom of another. The first one has no light, except through a round hole at the top, and the second has a round, hole through which you drop into the lower one. We think that Paul was there. It is a triton that he was. And then there is the Palatine prison, which was at the guard-house of the Praetorian guards, near the palace on the Palatine Hill. There Paul certainly was, and Onesiphorus went from one jail to another.

"Have you seen a little Jew with weak eye?" I daresay that was his description of him. "He is a friend of mine. I want to speak with him."

"What! that Paul?—the man that is chained to one or another of us every morning? We have twelve hours of it, and he preaches to us most of the time." "Oh! that is the man," said Onesiphorus. "That is the man. Does he talk about Jesus Christ?" "Oh! nothing else but that. He will not let any soldier go from being bound to him without hearing about Jesus Christ." "That is my man," said Onesiphorus. He sought him out very diligently, and he found him.

18. *The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day:*

He came to Paul, and talked with him and probably sang with him, and prayed

with him, I have no doubt. He often refreshed the apostle in Rome; and then Paul added:

And in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

This happy Onesiphorus, was a true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved to minister to the apostle when he was in suffering and sorrow.

2 Timothy 2

1, 2. *Thou therefore, my son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus and the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*

This is the true apostolical succession—one minister brings another to Christ, and then charges that other to train other preachers and teachers to carry on the blessed work of evangelization.

3, 4. *Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

The man who has given himself wholly to the service of Christ must not undertake any other business that would prevent his giving his whole strength to his Master’s work.

5–8. *And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to My gospel:*

The resurrection of Christ is the corner-stone of the glorious temple of truth, the key-stone of the arch of revelation. Paul tells us, in that great chapter, 1

Corinthians 15, how hopeless our case would be if Christ was not “raised from the dead;” but he also proves most conclusively that he was raised “the third day, according to the Scriptures.”

9. *Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.*

Thank God that it is not yet bound though many have tried to fetter it. When they think that they have manacled it, it breaks loose again, and so it always will. However low this heavenly fire may burn, it soon blazes up again, and so it shall to the world’s end. Immortal as the Christ who is the sum and substance of it is the everlasting gospel of the blessed God.

10–13. *Therefore I endure all things from the elect’s sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: if we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.*

Ah, there are two in the dungeon—not only the man who is suffering trouble as an evil-doer, even unto bonds, but there sits with him one like unto the Son of Man, sharing all his griefs, and bearing all his despondencies, and so lifting up his head. Well may the apostle rejoice that he has fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.

Blessed truth, God grant us the grace to mediate upon it until we also shall become faithful to him and to his truth!

15. *Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

This is a metaphor taken from the action of the priest at the sacrifice. The priest cut up the bullock, and then laid it in its different pieces according to order. Or, as some think it is taken from the part of the father at the table, when he carves

the meat and gives to every child its portion. Old Master Trapp says that “there are some ministers who are only fit to be Gibeonites and certainly not to be Levites, for they hardly understand the cutting of wood, much less the art of cutting up the sacrifice of God.” Brethren, it is well so to handle the word as to be able to give rebuke when rebuke is wanted, exhortation when it is needed, and comfort when consolation is required, for otherwise we do mischief. As it is said in the old fable of the simpleton, that he gave to the ass a bone and to the dog hay, so there are some who give wrong exhortations, not because they are wrong in themselves, but because they are wrong in their application.

16, 17. *But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker, of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus.*

Now, there are some people who can never be content except they make their religion a sort of wrangling match. They get a-hold of a word in Scripture, and away they go with it. Here shall be another opportunity for finding fault with all the church of God; here shall be another occasion for railing against all the preachers of the truth. How delighted they are when they can do this! Shun profane and vain babblings. Martin Luther said that there were some in his day so nice and precise about the letter of: Scripture that when one of them had delivered an exposition upon the Book of Job,

Luther said that by the time the man had got to the tenth chapter Job had been a thousand times more plagued by the expositors than he had ever been by the losses which he suffered upon the dunghill, and doubtless there are many truths of Scripture which are turned to mischief because men will be for ever making them opportunities for strife, and not bonds of love.

Brethren, hold the five points of the Calvinistic doctrine, but mind you do not hold them as babbling questions. What you have received of God do not learn in order to fight with it, and to make contention and strife, and to divide the church of God, and rail against the people of the Most high, as some do. But, on the contrary, love one another as brethren, and hold the truth in love, and seek after the unity of the Spirit and the perfect bond of charity. The word of those who raise these questions will eat as doth a cancer, which eats till it gets to the bones, and turns the sound flesh into rottenness. Oh! there are many contentions which have done this mischief in the church of Christ.

18-21. *Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.*

How careful the apostle is lest we should think that any have turned aside who were the Lord's people. He says the faith of some was overthrown, but nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure. Oh brethren, whenever we see apparent apostasy, let us not therefore think that any of God's people have perished. Oh, no; for the Lord knoweth them that are his.

And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a retreat house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth, and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

When Mr. Philpot the martyr, was addressing a young man about to die for Christ, he said to him, "Brother, thou art a vessel in the great house of thy Master, and this day he will scour thee, scour thee hard, but remember thou shalt soon stand upon the shelf, shining bright and glorious." Well, sometimes pains, and troubles, and tribulations do have, this effect of scouring the vessels of God to make them bright for heaven. We must all be purged and scoured from sinful lusts, from all the contamination of the flesh and of the creature, and then we shall be fit for the Master's use.

22, 23. *Flee also youthful lusts.*

Run away from them; it is no use contending with them. Fight with the devil. Resist the devil, and make him flee, but never fight with the flesh. Run away from that. The only way to avoid the lust of the flesh is to keep out of its way. If you subject yourself to carnal temptations and fleshly lusts, remember it is almost certain that you will be overcome by them.

“Flee youthful lusts”, and as you must keep going and have something after which to follow—

But follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

It is generally a good thing to avoid all questions that gender strife, except they be upon vital and important matters. For, oh! brethren, it is so important to keep the unity of the Spirit, it is such a blessed thing to preserve love among Christian brethren, and there be some who in order to create disunion, go about the land, and tear, and rend the body of Christ as much as ever they can. Beware of such; seek not their company; come not nigh unto them, lest their canker pollute you also.

24–26. *And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.*

We have here laid down, then, the duty of the Christian minister, and the duty of each Christian, too, and let us seek, in the Holy Spirit’s grace, to carry it out, being at once firm, and gentle, and loving of heart, and yet honest for the truth as it is in Jesus.

2 Timothy 3

1–4. *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God,*

What a wretched being man is, as a sinner against God! Unchecked by law, and allowed to do as he pleases, what will not man become? See how Paul describes men in these progressive times—in these enlightened centuries. Human nature was not at all slandered by Whitefield when he said that, “left to himself, man is half beast and half devil.” Has any other creature, except the fallen angels, ever become so cruel, so mean, so false? Behold what villains, what tyrants, what monsters sin has made!

It is a very terrible list. The like have appeared in other days, but we are led by his warning to apprehend that they will appear in greater numbers in the last days than in any previous age. These will swarm like flies in the decay of the year, and will make the times exceeding perilous. We are nearing that period at this very time.

5. *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

Religion is essentially a spiritual thing, but it requires a form in which to embody and manifest itself. Christian people fall into a certain outward method of procedure, a peculiar outward mode of uttering their faith, which becomes to true godliness what the body is to the soul. The form is useful, the form is

necessary, the form ought to be vitalized; just as the body is useful, and is necessary, and is vitalized by the soul. If you get both the form, as modelled in the Word of God, and the power, as bestowed by the Spirit of God, you do well, and are living Christians. If you get the power alone, without the ordained form, you somewhat maim yourself; but if you get the form without the power, then, you dwell in spiritual death.

6, 7. *For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sin, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

This is the photograph of the present age, and I do not doubt that Paul spoke of it when thus the spirit of prophecy was upon him. This is the very motto of the present age, “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” It glories in knowing nothing; and its great boast is in its continual progress, “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

What numbers of professors I have known who go into one place of worship and hear one form of doctrine and apparently approve it because the preacher is “a clever man!” They hear an opposite teaching, and they are equally at home, because again it is “a clever man!” They join with a church, and you ask them, “Do you agree with the views of that community?” They neither know nor care what those views may be; one doctrine is as good as another to them. Their spiritual appetite can enjoy soap as well as butter; they can digest bricks as well as bread. These religious ostriches have a marvellous power of swallowing everything—they have no spiritual discernment, no appreciation of truth. They follow any “clever” person, and in this prove that they are not the sheep of our Lord’s pasture, of whom it is written, “A stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers.” We desire to build up a church with those who know what they do know, and can give a reason for what they believe.

8, 9. *Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as their’s also was.*

Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses. We read that the magicians did so with their enchantments, whether by devilish arts or by sleight of hand, we need not now enquire: in either case they did the devil service, and they did it well—for Pharaoh's heart was hardened when he saw that the magicians wrought, in appearance, the self-same miracles as Moses. But when God was with Moses and Aaron, Jannes and Jambres were soon, by the power and wisdom of God, proved to be fools.

And as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do false prophets withstand us. Even at this hour there are those who oppose us, who are always speaking smooth things to the people. With the devil at their head, that arch-master and prince of deceivers, there is a great company abroad in the world who are always saying, "It shall not he so; you shall have pleasure though you sin; you shall have rest though you disobey, and it shall he well with you at the end even though you reject the gospel of Christ." Not in so many words, but in effect this is the loud proclamation of the messengers of Satan who are permitted to buffet us. A prophet's courage is needed still by preachers of the word of God.

10–12. *But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecution I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*

The world does not love Christ, or his gospel, an atom more today than it did in Paul's day. "The carnal mind is" still "enmity against God." It is the nature of the wicked to hate the righteous, even as the wolf rages against the sheep. This world cannot be the friend of the friend of God, unless, indeed, Belial can have concord with Christ, and this we know is impossible. In one form or another, the Egyptian will oppress the Israelite till the day of the bringing out with a high hand and an outstretched arm. If today the enmity is restrained in its manifestation, it is because the law of the land, by the good providence of God, does not now allow of the rack, the stake, or the dungeon. Our Lord said to his first disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation," and he explained it to mean that men would put them out of the synagogues; yea, that the time would come when those that killed them would think that they did God service.

Tribulation of that sort remains up to the measure in which it is not hindered by divine power; the spirit out of which it sprang cannot die till men are renewed. A man's foes are still they of his own household.

13. *But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

We may look for even worse days and darker days than we have at present. Paul does not paint the future with rose-color: he is no smoothtongued prophet of a golden age, into which this dull earth may be imagined to be glowing. There are sanguine brethren who are looking forward to everything growing better and better and better, until, at last, this present age ripens into a millennium. They will not be able to sustain their hopes, for Scripture gives them no solid basis to rest upon. We who believe that there will be no millennial reign without the King, and who expect no rule of righteousness except from the appearing of the righteous Lord, are nearer the mark. Apart from the second Advent of our Lord, the world is more likely to sink into a pandemonium than to rise into a millennium. A divine interposition seems to me the hope set before us in Scripture, and, indeed, to be the only hope adequate to the occasion.

The warning which Paul gave concerning his own times is quite as needful for this present age. Again darkness thickens, and the mists hang heavily around our footsteps. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, and very many have turned away their ears from the truth to hearken to fables. Nor do we wonder that it is so. History must repeat itself so long as we have the same human nature to deal with, the same sins to ensnare mankind, the same truth to be bided with, and the same devil to stir men up to the same mischief.

14. *But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them;*

But when the same evils come, we must apply to them the same remedies. When a disease appears which has done deadly mischief in past times, physicians enquire for medicines which on a former occasion curbed the enemy. We are bound to do the same in spiritual matters. We must see what Paul did in his day when the malaria of false doctrine was in the air. Let us not talk of inventing wise measures for the present distress in the spiritual world, but let us use the

great remedy which was so effectual in Paul's day. Paul taught young Timothy the gospel himself: he made him not only hear his doctrine, but see his practice. We cannot force truth upon men, but we can make our own teaching clear and decided, and make our lives consistent therewith. Truth and holiness are the surest antidotes to error and unrighteousness

15. *And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures,*

He then dwelt upon another potent remedy which had been of great service to the young preacher, namely, the knowing of the holy scriptures from his earliest childhood. This was to young Timothy one of his best safeguards. His early training held him like an anchor, and saved him from the dreadful drift of the age. Happy young man, of whom the apostle could say, "From a child thou hast known the Holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"!

Give us the first seven years of a child, with God's grace, and we may defy the world, the flesh, and the devil to ruin that immortal soul. Those first years, while yet the clay is soft and plastic, go far to decide the form of the vessel. Do not say that your office, you who teach the young, is in the least degree inferior to ours, whose main business is with older folks. No, you have the first of them, and your impressions, as they come first, will endure last: oh that they may be good, and only good!

Which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

How are we to go on to wisdom? Not by quitting the way of faith, but by keeping to that same faith in Christ Jesus by which we began to learn. In the school of grace faith is the great faculty by which we make advances in wisdom. If by faith thou hast been able to say A and B and C, it must be by faith that thou shalt go on to say D and E and F, until thou shalt come to the end of the alphabet, and be an expert in the Book of Wisdom.

16, 17. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in*

righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

A sentence from the mouth of God will have more permanent power over a Christian man, than the best composed of human statements. God's Word is living, and powerful, and has a power to enter the heart beyond that of any other word. The words of the Bible strike and stick, they enter and abide. He that has been taught in Scripture, steeped in Scripture, saturated with Scripture, is conscious of its permeating influence, and it gives him permanence of conviction. Like the crimson dye in cloth, the tint of Scripture is not to be got out of the soul when once fixed there; it is dyed ingrain, it enters into the very nature of the man. Bible truth influences his thoughts, words, and deeds: it is all-pervading; he begins to eat, and drink, and sleep holy scripture. The man's heart is fixed on God, fixed in the truth, fixed in holy living. He will stand fast, however evil the days. Though all the rest should apostatize, this man cannot; for the divine Word through faith has bound him to the altar of the Lord, and in the truth he must and will both live and die, come what weathers there may.

2 Timothy 4

1, 2. *I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word;*

We are not to use such strong language as this, unless there is some sufficient reason for it. We must not be too hot upon cold matters, but even this is better than to be cold upon matters that require heat. When John Calvin wished to leave Geneva to complete his studies elsewhere, that man of God, Farrell, knowing how necessary it was for the Church that Calvin should remain at Geneva, charged him before God that he dared not go, and hoped that a curse might light upon all his studies, if for the sake of them he should forsake what he held to be his duty. So sometimes, like the Apostle, we may before the Judge of quick and dead, charge men not to forsake their work and calling.

Be instant in season, out of season;

The Greek word means, “Stand up to it;” as when a man id determined to finish his work, he stands right up to it. Stand over your work, putting your whole strength into it up-standing over it. “In season, out of season,” because the Gospel is a fruit which is in season all the year round.

Sometimes these “out of season” sermons, preached at night or at some unusual time, have been of more service than the regular ordinances of God’s house. Mr. Grimshaw used to ride on horseback from village to village throughout the more desolate parts of Yorkshire, and wherever he met with ten or a dozen people, he would preach on horseback to them, preaching sometimes as many as four and twenty sermons in a week. That was being instant “out of season” as well as “in season.” So should God’s Timothys be, and, indeed, all of us.

Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

That is, do not exhort with mere declamation, but put some argument into your exhortation. Some men think it quite enough to appear to be in earnest, though they have nothing to say. Let such exhorters remember that they are to exhort with doctrine, with solid teaching.

3. *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;*

When men have not good preachers, they are sure to have a great many of them. Those nations which have the worst priests always have them in swarms. So let us be thankful if God sends us a glowing and zealous minister, for even those who count it an affliction to have a minister, would be more afflicted if they had not a good one. But how evil is it when men get itching ears, when they want some one to be perpetually tickling them, giving them some pretty things, come fine pretentious intellectualism. In all congregations there is good to be done, except in a congregation having itching ears. From this may God deliver us.

4. *And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

When a man will not believe the truth, he is sure ere long to be a greedy believer of lies. No persons are so credulous as skeptics. There is no absurdity so gross but what an unbeliever will very soon be brought to receive it, though he rejects the truth of God.

5, 6. *But watch thou in all things, endure affliction, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.*

So near, so very near the change—his removal from this to another world; and so very conscious of it; yet Paul looked back with calm satisfaction; he looked forward with sweet assurance; and he looked round with deepest interest on the

mission that had engaged his life. Writing what he well knows is the last letter he shall ever write, its main topic is care for the church of God—anxiety for the promotion of the truth—zeal for the furtherance of the gospel. When he is dead, and gone from the post of service, the scene of suffering, the field of enterprise, on whom shall his mantle fall? He desires that in Timothy he may find a worthy successor, strong in the faith, sincere of heart, and having dauntless courage withal, one who will wield the sword and hold the banner when his hand is palsied in death. Men have usually shown us what lies at the bottom of their heart when they have come to die. Often their last expiring expressions have been indicative of their entire character. Certainly you have before you in the last sentences of Paul's pen a fair epitome of his entire life. He is trusting in the Savior; he is anxious to show his love for that Savior. The welfare of the Christian church and the advancement of the holy cause of the gospel are uppermost in his mind.

7. *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:*

Here I see the apostle, though he wears all the marks of the conflict, yet he triumphs in these marks of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I have fought a good fight; my very scars and wounds prove it; I have kept the faith." He looks to that golden buckler of the faith fastened to his arm, and rejoices in it. The tyrant Nero never had such triumph as the apostle Paul, nor all the warriors of Rome, when the multitudes climbed the chimney-tops, and looked down upon the procession. None of them had such true glory as this solitary man, who has trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there were none with him; who has stood against the lion, a solitary champion, with no eye to pity and no arm to save, still triumphant to the end. Brave spirit! never mind the old cloak at Troas, so long as thy faith is safe.

8. *Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day:*

"Ah," says the sinner, "who would be a Christian? Who would suffer so much for Christ? Who would lose everything as Paul did?" Worldly minds here are thinking—"What a fool, to be led away by such an excitement!" Ah! but see how the tables have turned! "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown!" What

if he had been robed in scarlet, had rolled in wealth, and been great, and there had been no crown for him in heaven, no joy hereafter, but a fearful looking for of judgment? See, he springs from his dungeon to his throne. Nero may cut off his head, but that head shall wear a starry crown.

And not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

This seems, then, to be a distinguishing mark of a true child of God, he loves the appearing of Christ. Now there are some professors who never think of the Second Advent at all. It never gives them the slightest joy to believe that—

"Jesus the king will come,
To take his people up
To their eternal home."

Truly they are mistaken and are surely wrong, for was not this the very comfort that Christ gave to his disciples: "If I go away, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." I trust, dear friends, we are among those "who love his appearing," and if we are, it is a sure prophecy that we shall have a crown of righteousness.

9, 10. *Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica;*

Demas was once almost a martyr, he was upon the very edge of suffering, but now you see he goeth back to the world again; he is not content to lie in the dungeon and rot with Paul, but will rather seek his own ease. Alas! Demas, how hast thou dishonored thyself for ever, for every man who reads this passage as he passes by, flings another stone at the heap which is the memorial of one of cowardly spirit who fled from Paul in danger.

Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia.

It is likely that Paul had sent Crescens and Titus away upon a mission but now, from certain intimations, the Apostle is sure that his time of death is coming on,

and so indeed it was, for his head was struck off by Nero's orders a few weeks after the writing of this Epistle, and now he somewhat laments that he had sent them away. And would not you and I want the consolation of kind faces round about us, and the sweet music of loving voices in our ears, if we were about to be offered up?

11. *Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee for he is profitable to me for the ministry.*

That is one of the prettiest verses in the Bible, because you will remember that the Apostle Paul quarreled with Barnabas about this very Mark, because John Mark would not go into Bythinia to preach the Word, but left Paul and Barnabas, therefore Paul would not have Mark with him any more, because he had turned in the day of trouble. But now Paul is about to die, and he wishes to be perfectly at peace with everyone. He has quite forgiven poor John Mark himself for his former weakness; he sees grace in him, and so he is afraid lest John Mark should be under some apprehensions of the Apostle's anger, and so he puts in this very kind passage, without seeming to have any reference at all to the past, but he gives him this great praise—"for he is profitable to me for the ministry."

12, 13. *And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus. The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.*

Very likely the apostle Paul was seized at Troas on the second occasion of his being taken before the Roman emperor. The soldiers usually appropriated to themselves any extra garment in the possession of an arrested person, such things being considered as the perquisites of those who made the arrest. The apostle may have been forewarned of his seizure, and therefore prudently committed his few books and his outer garment, which made up all his household stuff, to the care of a certain honest man named Carpus. Although Troas was full six hundred miles' journey from Rome, yet the apostle Paul is too poor to purchase a garment, and so directs Timothy, as he is coming that way, to bring his cloak. He needs it much, for the sharp winter is coming on, and the dungeon is very, very chilly.

Paul had a few books which were left, perhaps wrapped up in the cloak, and

Timothy was to be careful to bring them. Even an apostle must read. He is inspired, and yet he wants books! He has been preaching at least for thirty years, and yet he wants books! He had seen the Lord, and yet he wants books! He had had a wider experience than most men, and yet he wants books! He had been caught up into the third heaven, and had heard things which it was unlawful for a men to utter, yet he wants books! He had written the major part of the New Testament, and yet he wants books! The apostle says to Timothy and so he says to every preacher, “Give thyself unto reading.”

14, 15. *Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.*

And yet that Alexander was once foremost in danger, and even exposed his own person in the theater at Ephesus, that he might rescue the apostle. There are none so bad as those who once seemed to be good. “If the salt has lost its savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned?” That which is best when ripe, is worst when rotten; liquor which is sweetest in one stage, becomes sourest in another. Let not him that putteth on his armor boast as though he putteth it off; for even common sense teaches you, that it is not to begin, but to continue to the end which marks the time of the child of God.

16, 17. *At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.*

Poor soul, he served his God, and worked himself down to poverty for the Church’s sake, yet the Church has forsaken him! Oh! how great must have been the anguish of the loving heart of Paul at such ingratitude. Why did not the few who were in Rome, if they had been never so poor, make a contribution for him? What patience does this teach to those similarly situated! In your greatest trials do you find your fewest friends? Have those who once loved and respected you, fallen asleep in Jesus? And have others turned out to be hypocritical and untrue? What are you to do now? You are to remember this case of the apostle; it is put

here for your comfort. He had to pass through as deep waters as any that you are called to ford, and yet remember, he says, “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me.” So now, when man deserts you, God will be your friend. This God is our God for ever and ever—not in sunshiny weather only, but for ever and ever. This God is our God in dark nights as well as in bright days. Go to him, spread your complaint before him. Murmur not. If Paul had to suffer desertion, you must not expect better usage. Let not your faith fail you, as though some new thing had happened to you.

18. *And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Consider the weakness of the flesh, the strength of inward corruption, the fury of Satanic temptation, the seductions of wealth and the pride of life, the world and the fashion thereof; all these things are against us, and yet behold, “greater is he that is for us than all they that be against us,” and defying sin, and Satan, and death, and hell, the righteous holds on his way.

Every true believer shall be a conqueror, and hence the reason for warring a good warfare. There is laid up for us in heaven a crown of life that fadeth not away. The crown is laid up for us, and not for chance comers. The crown reserved for me is such that no one else can wear it; and if it be so, then will I battle and strive to the end, till the last enemy is overcome, and death itself is dead.

19. *Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus.*

I do not know why Paul in this case wrote “Priscilla and Aquila,” thus placing the wife first, for in the Acts we read of them as Aquila and Priscilla. I should not wonder but he put them in order according to quality rather than according to the rule of sex. He named Priscilla first because she was first in energy of character and attainments in grace. There is a precedence which, in Christ, is due to the woman when she becomes the leader in devotion, and manifests the stronger mind in the things of God. It is well when nature and grace both authorise our saying “Aquila and Priscilla,” but it is not amiss when grace outruns nature and we hear of “Priscilla and Aquila.”

20. *Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick.*

How glad he would have been of Trophimus, for we see how he begs Timothy to come with all speed, and to bring Mark with him, whose service he greatly needed. Yet not even for Paul's sake can Trophimus be suddenly raised up: his Lord sees it to be needful that he should feel the heat of the furnace, and into the crucible he must go. We think that the church cannot spare the earnest minister, the indefatigable missionary, the faithful deacon, the tender teacher; but God thinketh not so. No one is indispensable in the household of God. He can do his own work not only without Trophimus, but even without Paul.

Whatever the malady may have been which affected Trophimus, Paul could certainly have healed him if the divine Spirit had permitted the use of his miraculous powers to that end. He had raised up Eutychus from death, and he had given the use of his limbs to the cripple at Lystra; we feel, therefore, fully assured that had God allowed the apostle so to use his healing energy, Trophimus would have left his bed, and continued his journey to Rome. Not so, however, had the Lord willed; the good fruit-bearing vine must be pruned, and Trophimus must suffer: there were ends to be answered by his weakness which could not be compassed by his health. Instantaneous restoration could have been given, but it was withheld under divine direction.

21. *Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren.*

Looking forward to his impending martyrdom, Paul longed for the companionship of the one who was so specially dear to him.

22. *The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.*

He wishes the saints all the grace they need, all the grace they can desire; all the grace the Infinite God can give. How truly do I echo his great prayer that all grace may be with you all.

TITUS

Titus was sent to Crete, to superintend the preaching of the gospel throughout that island. Crete was at that time inhabited by a people who were only partially civilized, and sunk in the very worst of vices. Paul, therefore, tells Titus to speak to them about things which would hardly be mentioned to Christians nowadays.

Titus 1

1, 2. *Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;*

The word "lie," here includes beyond its ordinary meaning the thought of change, so that when we read that God cannot lie, we understand by it, not only that he cannot say what is untrue, but that having said something which is true he never changes from it, and does not by any possibility alter his purpose or retract his word. This is very consolatory to the Christian, that whatever God has said in the divine purpose is never changed. The decrees of God were not written upon sand, but upon the eternal brass of his unchangeable nature. We may truly say of the sealed book of the decrees, "Hath he said and shall he not do it? hath he purposed and shall it not come to pass?"

3, 4. *But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior; to Titus, mine own son after the common faith:*

Among the friends of Paul, Titus was one of the most useful and one of the best beloved. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, and Titus was a Gentile. I should suppose that both his parents were Gentiles, and in this respect he differed from Timothy, whose mother was a Jewess. Timothy would well serve as a preacher to the circumcision, but Titus would be a man after Paul's heart as a preacher to the Gentiles. He seems to have been a man of great common sense; so that, when Paul had anything difficult to be done, he sent Titus. When the collection was to be made at Corinth on behalf of the poor saints at Jerusalem, Paul sent Titus to stir the members up, and with him another brother to take charge of the

contributions. Titus appears to have been a man of business capacity and strict probity, as well as a man who could order the church aright, and preach the gospel with power. Paul was, on one occasion, comforted by the coming of Titus. At another time, he was sad because Titus was not where he had hoped to meet with him. Though we know little about him from the Acts of the Apostles, or anywhere else, he appears to have been in every way one of the ablest of the companions of Paul, and the apostle takes care to mention him over and over again in his Epistles to the Galatians and to the Corinthians, rendering honor to whom honor is due.

Paul says of himself and Titus, that there was a close relationship between them: "Titus, mine own son." Not that Titus was Paul's son after the flesh, for there was no natural relationship between them at all. Probably, in the early part of their lives, they had been total strangers to one another; but now, Paul views Titus as his son. We know, beloved, many of us, that the grace of God creates relationships of a very near and tender kind, relationships which will endure through life, relationships which will outlast death, and be, perhaps, even more strong and vivid in eternity than they are here.

Grace, mercy, and peace,

You have probably noticed that Paul's benediction, when he is writing to a minister, is always. "Grace, mercy, and peace." Writing to churches, his usual formula is, "Grace be to you, and peace;" but God's servants, called to the work of the ministry, need very special "mercy"—as if the higher the office, the greater the liability to sin, and therefore, in his Pastoral Epistles, whether he is addressing Titus or Timothy, Paul wishes for his sons in the faith, "Grace, mercy, and peace." Oh, what a mercy it will be for any of us ministers if, at the last, we are clear of the blood of all men! If, having been called to preach the gospel, we shall do it so faithfully as to be acquitted and even rewarded by our Lord and Master, it will he mercy upon mercy.

From God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior.

All good comes to us from God the Father, through the one Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. I love to think of this—that all the grace, mercy, and peace that come to you, and all the grace, mercy, and peace that come to me,

come from the heart of God. How many wagons there are upon the road of grace, and all of them heavily laden! One stops at that brother's door, and another waits at this sister's gate; but they all started from one spot.

5, 6. *For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee: if any be blameless, the husband of one wife,*

For there were many converts there who had two or three wives. Whatever position they might be permitted to occupy in the church, they could not become officers, they must keep in the rear rank.

6–12. *Having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own,*

According to Jerome, this was Epimenides, a prophet-poet, who lived in Crete in the sixth century before Christ.

Said, The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies.

They were a degraded people; and hence, those who would teach them had a most difficult task, and needed great grace. Paul exhorts Titus that only specially fit men, men whose example would have influence, and whose characters would have weight, should be allowed to be elders in such churches.

13–16. *This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they*

may be sound in the faith; not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

This was bad soil; but it had to be ploughed, and to be sown, and with an Almighty God at the back of the gospel plougher and sower, a fruitful harvest came even in Crete. We need not be afraid of the adaptation of the gospel to the lowest of the low. If there be any quarter of the town where the people are more sunken in vice than anywhere else, there the gospel is to be carried with more prayer and more faith than anywhere else. Depend upon it, God can bless his Word anywhere, among Cretans, or among any other sort of degraded people.

Titus 2

1. *But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine;*

There are certain things which are suitable to go with sound doctrine; they are meet and fit and appropriate thereto.

2. *That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.*

Among the heathen, old men often gave themselves up to drunkenness and gluttony; so now, this is the teaching that is to be given to aged Christian men. They need faith, love, and patience, as well as the virtues of sobriety, gravity, and temperance. The infirmities of old age often create petulance, so the grace of God is to make the venerable Christian to be full of faith, love, and patience.

3. *The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;*

Old women also among the heathen were often addicted to the taking of much wine, so here they are cautioned against it by the Spirit of God.

They are also tempted to spread slanderous reports against people: having little to do in their old age, they are apt to do that little by way of mischief; so they are warned that they are not to be “false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things.” And how beautifully can an aged Christian woman, by her kindly example, be a teacher of good things!

There is no more charming sight under heaven, I think, than that of an elderly

Christian lady, whose words and whose whole life are such as becometh the gospel of Christ.

4, 5. *That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.*

There were some women who supposed that, the moment they became Christians, they were to run about everywhere. “No,” says the apostle, “let them keep at home.” There is no gain to the Christian Church when the love, and the industry, and the zeal, which ought to make a happy home, are squandered upon something else. The young women of Crete appear to have been such that they needed to be taught “to love their husbands.”

That expression does not occur elsewhere in Scripture. Christian women do not need to be told to love their husbands; but these Cretans, just brought out of the slough of sin, had to be taught even this lesson. Oh, what a blessing is love in the marriage relationship, and what a gracious influence love has upon children! How are they to be brought up aright except the whole house be perfumed with love?

6. *Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.*

That exhortation is as necessary in London as it was in Crete. Young men often know a great deal, or think they do; and they are very apt to be intoxicated with the idea of knowing so much, and being able to do so much, so that the exhortation to them is to “be sober minded.”

7, 8. *In all things skewing thyself a pattern of good works:*

Titus was himself a young man; he must, therefore, be a pattern to young men; and as a pastor or evangelist he must be a pattern to all sorts of men.

In doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech,

that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

It is a pity when truth suffers at the hand of its own advocate; and perhaps the very worst wounds that truth has received have been in the house of its friends. You must be careful, therefore, "that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."

9, 10. *Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters,*

Then the man's master, however wicked he might be, would say, "Whatever has come over my slave? My orders are carried out exactly; all I could wish to have done is done, and done well. He is not an eye-servant or a mere man-pleaser; but he does his work heartily, and I have heard him say that he does it out of love to one Jesus, who is his God and Savior." The slave was to put aside all his selfishness, and, finding himself a slave, to determine that he would so serve his master that he might recommend his religion to his master.

And to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining,

Slaves and servants in Paul's time were all thieves. In the writings of secular authors of that period, you constantly meet with the declaration that "to multiply servants is to multiply thieves."

Of course, the poor creatures helped themselves whenever they could; if you treat a man like a dog, should you be surprised if he acts like one? But the Christian slave might be trusted with untold gold; and obedience to this precept, "not purloining," was the way in which he adorned the doctrine of God his Savior.

But shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

The life of the Christian, even if he be a servant, is to be an ornament of

Christianity. Christ does not look for the ornament of his religion to the riches or the talents of his followers, but to their holy lives “that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

Is not that a wonderful passage? Here is a slave able to be an ornament to the gospel of Christ! This blessed gospel is not sent to kings and princes only; when Paul preached it, the great mass of the population were in cruel bondage, treated like dogs, or even worse; yet the gospel had a message even for them, it told them that they might, by a godly character, adorn the doctrine of God their Savior.

11. *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,*

In the person of Christ the grace of God is revealed, as when the sun ariseth and makes glad all lands. It is not a private vision of God to a favored prophet on the lone mountain’s brow; but it is an open declaration of the grace of God to every creature under heaven—a display of the grace of God to all eyes that are open to behold it.

12. *Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*

Christians are not to run out of the world, as monks and hermits sought to do, but to live “in this present world.” Yet, while in the world, we are to be godly, that is, full of God. That kind of life which is without God is not for Christians. Those worldly desires, the pride and ambition, which are common to worldly men, are not to have power over us; we are to deny them, and to live soberly. This word relates not only to eating and drinking, but to the general sobriety of a man’s mind: “Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

13. *Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ,*

Paul believed in a Divine Savior. He did not preach a Savior who was a mere

man. He believed the Lord Jesus Christ to be truly man, but he also believed him to be God over all, and he therefore uses the striking words, “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.”

We look forward to a second appearing. Our outlook for the close of this present era is another appearing—an appearing of glory rather than of grace. After our Master rose from the brow of Olivet his disciples remained for a while in mute astonishment; but soon an angelic messenger reminded them of prophecy and promise by saying, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.” We believe that our Lord in the fullness of time will descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of the archangel, and the voice of God.

This is the terminus of the present age. We look from Anno Domini, in which he came the first time, to that greater Anno Domini, or year of our Lord, in which he shall come a second time, in all the splendor of his power, to reign in righteousness, and break the evil powers as with a rod of iron.

14. *Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity,*

That word “redemption” sounds in my ears like a silver bell. We are ransomed, purchased back from slavery, and this at an immeasurable price; not merely by the obedience of Christ, nor the suffering of Christ, nor even the death of Christ, but by Christ’s giving himself for us. All that there is in the great God and Savior was paid down that he might “redeem us from all iniquity.”

In the midnight of the world’s history our Lord appeared to put away sin. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the manifestation of the divine grace to men, came into the world to put an end to the unutterable tyranny of evil. His work and teaching are meant to uplift mankind at large, and also to redeem his people from all iniquity, and to sanctify them to himself us his peculiar heritage.

And purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

See what Christ died for, see what Christ lives for, see what we are to live for—that we should not only be a people purified, but purified unto Himself. We are

not only to have good works, but we are to be zealous of them; we are to burn with zeal for them, for zeal is a kind of fire, it is to burn and blaze in us until we warm and enlighten others also.

15. *These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.*

As I have already reminded you, Titus was a young man; and people are apt to despise the pastoral office when it is held by a young man. Yet they ought always to respect it, whether it be held by a young man or an old man. God knows best who is most fitted for the work of the ministry: and those of us who are getting old must never look with any kind of scorn or contempt upon those who are commencing their service, for we, too, were young once. You cannot measure a man’s grace by the length of his beard, nor by the number of his years.

Titus 3

1. *Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.*

You see, they were a rough, wild, rebellious people in Crete, and Christianity comes to civilize, to sober, to sanctify, to save.

2. *To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.*

Gentleness was not reckoned a virtue among the Greeks; I do not suppose that the people in Crete had ever heard of it before Paul wrote this Epistle to Titus. Among the Romans and the Greeks, it seemed to be a virtue to stand up for your own, to be like a gamecock, who is always ready to fight, and will never miss a chance of fighting; but this Christian virtue of gentleness is a most amiable one, and greatly adorns the doctrine of Christ.

The world has run away with this word gentle, and now calls many a person a gentleman who has no right to the name. I wish that every gentleman were indeed a gentleman. It is very significant that Moses, the type of the Lord Jesus under the law, was the meekest of men; should not Christians therefore excel in gentleness under this milder dispensation?

Meekness and gentleness are two of the ornaments of our faith. I would that some professed Christians would understand that unholy contentiousness is not after the mind of Christ, it is not according to that gracious command, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” No, the Christian must be willing to suffer wrongfully, and to bear it in patience; he is never to be one who renders evil for evil, or railing for railing.

3. *For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish,*

Well, then, if other people are foolish, we ought to bear with them.

Disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

That is what we were once; and if the grace of God has made a change in us, we must not boast, we must not censure others, we must not set up as self-righteous judges of others. Oh, no! our action must be the very reverse of all this.

4. *But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared,*

Man was in the dark, plunging onward to blacker midnight every step he took. I do not find, as I read history, any excuse for the modern notion that men are longing for God, and laboring to find him. No, the sheep were never seeking the Shepherd, but all were going astray. Men everywhere turn their backs to the light, and try to forget what has been handed down by their forefathers: they are everywhere feeling after a great lie which they may raise to the throne of God. We do not by nature long after God, nor sigh for his holiness. The gracious Lord came in uncalled for and unsought, and in the bounty of his heart, and in the great love of his nature, he determined to save man.

5. *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us,*

We could not have been saved at the first by our works of righteousness; for we had not done any. “No,” says the apostle, “we were foolish, disobedient, deceived,” and therefore we had no works of righteousness, and yet the Lord interposed and saved us. Behold and admire the splendor of his love, that “He loved us even when we were dead in sins.” He loved us, and therefore quickened us. God does not come to men to help them when they are saving themselves; but he comes to the rescue when they are damning themselves. When the heart is full of folly and disobedience, the good God visits it with his favor. He comes,

not according to the hopefulness of our character, but according to his mercy; and mercy has no eye except for guilt and misery.

By the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

The way in which we are delivered from the dominion of sin is by the work of the Holy Ghost. This adorable Person is very God of very God. This divine Being comes to us, and causes us to be born again. By his eternal power and Godhead, he gives us a totally new nature, a life which could not grow out of our former life, nor be developed from our nature—a life which is a new creation of God. We are saved, not by evolution, but by creation. The Spirit of God creates us anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. We experience regeneration, which means being generated over again, or born again. Remember the result of this as set forth in covenant terms—"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh." This great process is carried out by the Holy Ghost.

6. *Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior;*

Both justification and sanctification come to us through the medium of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is shed on us abundantly "through Jesus Christ our Savior." Beloved, never forget that regeneration is wrought in us by the Holy Spirit, but comes to us by Jesus Christ. We do not receive any blessing apart from our Lord Jesus. In all works of the Spirit, whether regeneration or renewal, it is the Lord Jesus who is putting forth his power.

7. *That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

This day we are just in the sight of God in Christ's righteousness, through which we are "justified by grace." Jehovah sees no sin for which he must punish us; he has said, "Take away his filthy garments from him, and set a fair mitre upon his head"; and this is done. We are accepted in the Beloved. Since Jesus has washed our feet, we are "clean every whit"—clean in the double sense of being washed with water and with blood, and so cleansed from the power and guilt of sin.

What a high privilege is this! Can we ever sufficiently praise God for it?

8. *This is a faithful saying,*

It would be worth while for you to turn to the other places in which this expression, “This is a faithful saying,” occurs. This is one among four great matters thus described. It is not trivial, it is not a temporary precept which belongs to an extinct race and a past age.

And these things I will that thou affirm constantly,

Titus must repeat perpetually the precept which commands the careful maintenance of good works. Certain people turn on their heel, and say, “That is legal talk. The preacher is preaching up works instead of grace.” What! will you dare to say that? I will meet you face to face at God’s right hand at the last day if you dare to insinuate so gross a libel. Dare you say that I do not preach continually salvation by the grace of God, and by the grace of God only? Having preached salvation by grace without a moment’s hesitation, I shall also continually affirm that they which have believed in God must be “careful to maintain good works.”

That they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.

They are saved by faith; let them be careful to maintain good works. This precept is full in its meaning. In another Scripture you are told to be careful for nothing, but here you are bidden to be careful to maintain good works. We read, “casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you”: but do not cast off your care to maintain good works. You have a number of cares about you; slip a bridle over their heads, and train them to plough in the field of good works. Do not let care be wasted over food and raiment and such temporary matters. These may be left with God; but take sacred cares upon you—the cares of holy and gracious living. Yoke your best thoughts to the car of holiness—“be careful to maintain good works.”

These things are good and profitable unto men.

“These things are good and profitable unto men,” that is, to those who practice and observe them.

9. *But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.*

There are hundreds of questions, which are thought by some people to be very important, but which have no practical bearing whatever, either upon the glory of God, or upon the holiness of man. We are not to go into these matters; let those who have time to waste take up these questions; as for us, we have not time enough for things that are unprofitable and vain.

In these days some are occupied with questions about the future state, instead of accepting the plain testimony of Scripture, and some give more prominence to speculations drawn from prophecy than to the maintaining of good works. I reverence the prophecies; but I have small patience with those whose one business is guessing at their meaning. One whose family was utterly unruly and immoral met with a Christian friend, and said to him: “Do you quite see the meaning of the Seven Trumpets?” “No,” answered his friend, “I do not; and if you looked more to your seven children the seven trumpets would suffer no harm.”

10, 11. *A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.*

Leave him his utmost liberty to go where he likes, believe what he likes, and do what he likes; but, at the same time, you as Christian people must disown him, that is all you ought to do, except to pray and labor for his restoration. When it comes to unbelief of fundamental and vital doctrines, we who are like Titus, set in office over a church, must deal with such deadly evils with a strong hand.

12, 13. *When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis: for I have determined there to winter. Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them.*

Paul had already told Titus to bid the saints in Crete to abound in good works; now he is commanded to take care of certain travelling Christians, and to speed them on their way. It was the custom in olden times, when travelling was very different from what it is now, when the Christians passed from one town to another, to find out the church, and to be entertained and speeded on their journey by their fellow-believers. Thus they kept up a practical fellowship of love to all the saints.

14. *And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.*

How the apostle comes back to that point! Let all our people, our friends, our brethren, our kinsfolk, “let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.”

15. *All that are with me salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.*

O may that grace be with you which was poured upon our glorious Head and continues to distil to the skirts of his priestly garments. May his sacred unction anoint and perfume us all! It was poured on Jesus that it might drop on us. He received this fullness that we might receive out of him grace for grace. He does not possess grace that he may store it up for himself, for he needs it not; but he has all fullness in himself on purpose for us, that we may partake thereof both now and for ever. O that we may manifest it in our lives both public and private, in the emotions of our hearts, and the words of our mouths.

PHILEMON

This is one of Paul's private letters, though it has the stamp of inspiration upon it. It was not written concerning church business, nor to teach some great doctrinal truth, but there was a runaway slave who had come to Rome, and who had been converted under Paul's ministry, and Paul was sending him back to his master; and this was the letter which he was to take with him, to make some sort of apology for him, and to ask his master to receive him with kindness, and to forgive his fault.

1. *Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ*

Every word of this Epistle is very wisely put. Paul begins by calling himself "a prisoner of Jesus Christ." Who would not grant him his desire when he was wearing a chain for Christ's sake? If a letter were to come to you from some beloved minister, whom you knew to be lying in a dungeon and likely soon to die, you would be greatly touched if you noticed the traces of the rust of his fetters on the letter. "Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ,"—

1, 2. *And Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow-labourer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in thy house;*

He joins Timothy with himself, to give double weight to the message. Probably Timothy was well known to Philemon, and much respected by him, so he puts Timothy's name that there might be two to plead with him.

Then, notice the loving titles with which Paul addresses Philemon: "our dearly beloved, and fellow laborer." Probably the person whom Paul called "beloved Apphia" was Philemon's wife, so he writes to help also for perhaps the wife was the more tender-hearted of the two, so she might put in a good word for

Onesimus, and her husband would all the more readily grant Paul's request. He also mentions Archippus, who was either the pastor of the church at Colosse, or an evangelist who stayed occasionally at the house of Philemon. So he mentions him with all the rest of the household who met there for worship, and so made up the church in the house.

3–7. *Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; that the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.*

Paul recalls how much Philemon had done in the comforting of persecuted and poor saints. And when you are about to ask a favor of anyone, it is well to show your gratitude for what you or others have already received from him.

8, 9. *Therefore though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.*

He says in effect, "I am an apostle, and I am your spiritual father, so I might have spoken with authority to you, and have said, 'It is your duty to do this;' but I am not going to do anything of the kind. I am going to plead with you, and beseech it of you as a kindness and a favor. Pay a loving tribute to my old age; and beside that, I am a prisoner shut up in the dungeon for Christ's sake; hear the clanking of my chains, and grant my request for love's sake.'"

10. *I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds:*

The apostle Paul was eminently large-hearted and sympathetic. Surely he had enough to do at Rome to bear his own troubles and to preach the gospel. If, like

the priest in the parable of the good Samaritan, he had “passed by on the other side,” he might have been excused, for he was on the urgent business of that Master who once said to his seventy messengers, “Salute no man by the way.” We might not have wondered if he had said, “I cannot find time to attend to the wants of a runaway slave.” But Paul was not of that mind. He had been preaching, and Onesimus had been converted, and henceforth he regarded him as his own son. I do not know why Onesimus came to Paul.

Perhaps he went to him as a great many scapegraces have come to me—because their fathers knew me; and so, as Onesimus’s master had known Paul, the servant applied to his master’s friend, perhaps to beg some little help in his extremity. Anyhow, Paul seized the opportunity and preached to him Jesus, and the runaway slave became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We see the grace of God in his election. He was a slave. In those days slaves were very ignorant, untaught, and degraded. Being barbarously used, they were for the most part themselves sunk in the lowest barbarism, neither did their masters attempt to raise them out of it; it is possible that Philemon’s attempt to do good to Onesimus may have been irksome to the man, and he may therefore hate fled from his house. His master’s prayers, warnings, and Christian regulations may have been disagreeable to him, and therefore he ran away. He wronged his master, which he could scarcely have done if he had not been treated as a confidential servant to some extent. Possibly the unusual kindness of Philemon, and the trust reposed in him may have been too much for his untrained nature. We know not what he stole, but evidently he had taken something, for the apostle says, “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account.” He ran away from Colosse, therefore, and thinking that he would be less likely to be discovered by the ministers of justice, he sought the city of Rome, which was then as large as the city of London now is, and perhaps larger. There in those back slums, such as the Jews’ quarter in Rome now is, Onesimus would go and hide; or amongst those gangs of thieves which infested the imperial city, he would not be known or heard of any more, so he thought; and he could live the free and easy life of a thief.

He may have heard Paul preach at Colosse and Athens, but yet he had not been impressed. In Rome, Paul was not preaching in St. Peter’s: it was in no such noble building. Paul was not preaching in a place like the Tabernacle, where Onesimus could have a comfortable seat—no such place as that—but it was probably down there at the back of the Palatine hill, where the praetorian guard

have their lodgings, and where there was a prison called the praetorian. In a bare room in the barrack prison Paul sat with a soldier chained to his hand, preaching to all who were admitted to hear him, and there it was that the grace of God reached the heart of this wild young man, and, oh, what a change it made in him immediately! Now you see him repenting of his sin, grieved to think he has wronged a good man, vexed to see the depravity of his heart as well as the error of his life. He weeps; Paul preaches to him Christ crucified, and the glance of joy is in his eye: and from that heavy heart a load is taken. New thoughts light up that dark mind; the very face is changed, and the entire man renewed, for the grace of God can turn the lion to a lamb, the raven to a dove.

11, 12. *Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me:*

The grace of God was conspicuous in the character which it wrought in Onesimus upon his conversion, for he appears to have been helpful, useful, and profitable. So Paul says. Paul was willing to have had him as an associate, and it is not every man that is converted that we should altogether choose as a companion. There are odd people to be met with who will go to heaven we have no doubt, for they are pilgrims on the right way, but we would like to keep on the other side of the road, for they are cross-grained, and there is a something about them that one's nature can no more delight in than the palate can take pleasure in nauseous physic. They are a sort of spiritual hedgehogs; they are alive and useful, and no doubt they illustrate the wisdom and patience of God, but they are not good companions: one would not like to carry them in his bosom. But Onesimus was evidently of a kind, tender, loving spirit. Paul at once called him brother, and would have liked to retain him.

12. *Whom I have sent again:*

When he sent him back, was it not a clear proof of change of heart in Onesimus that he would go back? Away as he was in Rome, he might have passed on from one town to another, and have remained perfectly free, but feeling that he was under some kind of bond to his master—especially since he had injured him—he takes Paul's advice to return to his old position. He will go back, and take a letter of apology or introduction to his master; for he tells that it is his duty to make reparation for the wrong that he has done.

So Onesimus will go back to Philemon, and work out his term of years with him, or otherwise do Philemon's wishes, for though he might have preferred to wait upon Paul, his first duty was due to the man whom he had injured. That showed a gentle, humble, honest, upright spirit; and let Onesimus be commended for it: nay, let the grace of God be extolled for it.

thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels:

"Look upon him as though he were my very heart, and receive him as you would receive me if I could go to you."

13, 14. *Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel: but without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.*

"I would have kept him," says Paul, "for I need someone to be my companion, to comfort me in my distress; but I would not do it without asking your leave, lest I should seem to take advantage of you. Though I know that you would willingly consent to it, yet, nevertheless, that it might be perfectly voluntary on your part, I have sent him back to you, that you may do as you will with him."

15. *For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever;*

Onesimus had no right to rob his master and run away; but God was pleased to make use of that crime for his conversion. It brought him to Rome, and so brought him where Paul was preaching, and thus it brought him to Christ, and to his right mind. Now, when we speak of this, we must be cautious. When Paul says, "Perhaps he departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever," he does not excuse his departure. He does not make it out that Onesimus did right—not for a moment. Sin is sin, and, whatever sin may be overruled to do, yet sin is still sin.

16. *Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved,*

especially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?

You know we are a long while learning great truths. Perhaps Philemon had not quite found out that it was wrong for him to have a slave. Some men who were very good in their time did not know it. John Newton did not know that he was flying wrong in the slave trade, and George Whitfield, when he left slaves to the orphanage at Savannah, which had been willed to him, did not think for a moment that he was doing anything more than if he had been dealing with horses, or gold and silver. Public sentiment was not enlightened, although the gospel has always struck at the very root of slavery. The essence of the gospel is that we are to do to others as we would that others should do to us, and nobody would wish to be another man's slave, and therefore he has no right to have another man as his slave. Perhaps, when Onesimus ran away and came back again, this letter of Paul may have opened Philemon's eyes a little as to his own position. To doubt he may have been an excellent master, and have trusted his servant, and not treated him as a slave at all, but perhaps he had not regarded him as a brother; and now Onesimus has come back he will be a better servant, but Philemon will be a better master, and a slave-holder no longer. He will regard his former servant as a brother in Christ.

17. *If thou count me therefore a partner,*

"If thou hast true fellowship and communion with me,"—

receive him as myself.

How beautifully this is put all through! It very much reminds me of our Lord Jesus Christ, who seems to say to the Divine Father, "This poor child is in fellowship with me. Receive him, therefore, as myself;" and this is just what God does in the case of repenting and believing sinners; he receives them just as if he could see Christ in them.

18. *If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account;*

How generously this is put by this poor prisoner at Rome, and how gloriously, in this, he is like our Master, who stands as Surety for us!

19. *I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.*

Paul, as you know, was not accustomed to write letters with his own hand, but dictated to an amanuensis. It is supposed that he had an affection of the eyes, and therefore when he did write he used large capital letters, as he says in one of the epistles, "Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with my own hand." The epistle was not a large one, but he probably alluded to the largeness of the characters which he was obliged to use whenever he himself wrote. This letter to Philemon, at least part of it, was not dictated, but was written by his own hand. "I Paul have written it with mine own hand. I will repay it." It is the only note of hand which I recollect in Scripture, but there it is—an I O U for whatever amount Onesimus may have stolen.

Paul had been the means of Philemon's conversion, so he was immeasurably in debt to the apostle; but Paul only gently reminds him of the fact as a reason why he should deal kindly with Onesimus for his sake.

20. *Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.*

"You have refreshed others, then, surely, you will not let me be without refreshment now You have been very kind to all sorts of saints; then you cannot be unkind to the man who is your own spiritual father."

21. *Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that than it also do more than I say.*

This is delicately yet forcibly put, and we feel certain that Philemon must have done as Paul wished, even though we have no record of the fact.

22–25. *But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.*

The blessing is only meant, then, for spiritual-minded men, for such as have been born again of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ cannot be with the carnal. He will not give the blessing of his presence to those who mind earthly things. When ye have been born again ye can understand the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, but not till then.

HEBREWS

Hebrews 1

In this chapter our Saviour's glorious person is very plainly set before us, and it is made the ground of our faith, and a reason why we should give the more earnest heed to his words, lest at any time we should let them slip.

1, 2. *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son,*

The best last is ever God's rule. "Thou hast kept the best wine until now." Prophets are a very blessed means of communication, but how much more sure, how much more condescending is it for God to speak to us by his Son!

whom he hath appointed heir of all things,

To my mind, this is another wondrous encouragement to anyone who is seeking salvation. Christ has everything in his hand that is needed in order that he may save you, poor sinner. Sometimes, when a physician has a sick man before him —suppose it is on board ship—he may have to say to him, "I think I could cure your disease if I could get such-and-such a medicine; but, unfortunately, I have not the drug within my reach." Never will the great Physician of souls have to talk like that, for the Father hath committed all things into his hands.

by whom also he made the worlds;

I see him standing, as it were, at the anvil of omnipotence, hammering out the worlds that fly off, like sparks, on every side at each stroke of his majestic arm. It was Christ who was there—"the wisdom of God and the power of God," as Paul calls him—creating all things. I love to think that he who created all things is also our Savior, for then he can create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me; and if I need a complete new creation—as I certainly do—he is equal to the task.

3. *who being the brightness of his glory,*

As light is to the sun, so is Jesus to the glory of God. He is the brightness of that glory; that is to say, there is not any glory in God but what is also in Christ: and when that glory reaches its climax, when God the Ever-glorious is most glorious, that greatest glory is in Christ.

and the express image of his person,

Whatever God is, Christ is; the very likeness of God, the very Godhead of Godhead, the very Deity of Deity, is in Christ Jesus: "the express image of his person."

and upholding all things by the word of his power,

This great world of ours is upheld by Christ's word. If he did not speak it into continued existence, it would go back into the nothingness from whence it sprang. There exists not a being who is independent of the Mediator, save only the ever-blessed Father and the Spirit.

when he had by himself purged our sins,

There was no purging away of sin, except by Christ bearing the burden of it, and he did bear it. He bore all that was due to guilty man on account of his violation of the law of God, and God accepted his sacrifice as a full equivalent, and so he

purged our sins. He did not come to do something by which our sins might be purged, but he purged them effectually, actually, really, completely. He gave himself for us; not only his blood, but all that constituted himself, his Godhead, and his manhood. All that he had, and all that he was, he gave as the ransom price for us.

sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

And then see the glory which followed after the shame. He has now ascended up on high, and sits down at the right hand of God's great Majesty. Follow him, believer, follow him with the eye of thy faith; let thy soul lovingly track him in his upward march, and as thou seest him, say—"He is my Lord and my God," and know that all that he did and all that he is, he is, and he did for thee.

4, 5. *Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?*

They are servants, but they are not sons, they are created, but they are not begotten.

6–8. *And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire? But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom.*

So you perceive that Christ is no created angel. He is sometimes compared to an angel. He is sometimes called the angel of the covenant, but he is not a created angel. He is higher in nature, higher in rank, higher in intellect, and higher in power than they. He is nothing less than very God of very God.

9. *Thou had loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness, above thy fellows.*

As man Christ claims all men as his fellows, but as God he counts it no robbery to be thought equal to God. As man he is most truly man, and only superior to man by reason of the purity of his birth and the perfection of his nature, and the exaltation of his manhood by God; as God he is nothing less than God, though he took upon himself the nature of men.

10–12. *And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hath laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest, and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.*

Jesus is as truly the I AM, as that Jehovah who spoke out of the burning bush to Moses, at Horeb. He lives! He lives! Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and for ever.

13, 14. *But to which of the angel, said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*

In the person of Jesus Christ man stands next to Deity, I mean man twice born, man renewed by the Holy Spirit. What lofty dignity is this that even angels should be only “ministering spirits sent forth to minister” to us, our commissioned body-guard commanded to pitch their tents around us, our servitors to bear us up in their hands lest at any time we dash our feet against a stone! Speak of lords spiritual, these are they, the spiritual seed of Abraham: speak of kings and princes and peers of the blood royal, these are they in whom Jesus Christ’s Spirit dwells, who are brethren to the august Firstborn.

Hebrews 2

1. *Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.*

That is to say, because Jesus is so great, because the truths which he came to reveal are so infinitely important, “therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip; “for, sometimes, we seem to let them slip. We grow old; our mind is dull; our heart is occupied with other matters, and we let these heavenly things leak out, or drift by us, as if we were not concerned in them.

2. *For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward;*

The punishment for disobeying the word spoken by angels was death; what, then, must be the penalty of neglecting the great salvation wrought by the Divine Redeemer himself? He who does not give earnest heed to the gospel treats with disdain the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will have to answer for that sin when the King shall sit upon the throne of judgment. Trifle not, therefore, with that salvation which cost Christ so much, and which he himself brings to you with bleeding hands.

3. *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation:*

Not if we resist it, reject it, despise it, oppose it; but if we neglect it. If a man is in business, it is not necessary that he should commit forgery in order to fail; he can fail by simply neglecting his business. If a man is sick, he need not commit suicide by taking poison; he can do it just as surely by neglecting to take proper medicines. So is it in the things of God, neglect is as ruinous as distinct and open

opposition.

which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;

The apostles and the other followers of our Lord constantly bore witness to his miracles and his resurrection.

4. *God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?*

This gospel of ours is stamped with the seal of God; he has set his mark upon it, to attest its genuineness and authority. The miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were the seal that the gospel was no invention of man, but that it was indeed the message of God. Gifts of healing, gifts of tongues, gifts of miracles of divers kinds, were God's solemn declaration to man, "This is the gospel; this is my gospel which I send to you; therefore, refuse it not."

5. *For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.*

God has not made angels to be the preachers of the gospel. Doubtless they derive some happiness from it, if only from the sight of those converted under it; but it is in no sense under the government of angels.

6. *But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

God speaks to men by men. He has made them to be the choice and chosen instruments of his wondrous works of grace upon earth. Oh, what a solemn thing it is to be a preacher of the everlasting gospel! It is an office so high that an angel might covet it, but one that is so responsible that even an angel might tremble to undertake it. Pray for us who preach, not merely to a few, but to many of our fellow-creatures, that we may be the means, in the hand of God, of

blessing to our hearers.

7, 8. *Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownest him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.*

It was so with Adam in his measure. Before he fell, through his disobedience, all the animals which God had made were inferior to him, and owned him as their lord and master. It is infinitely more so in that second Adam who has restored to humanity its lost dignity, and, in his own person, has elevated man again to the head of creation.

For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.

We see not yet man the master of everything, not even Christ, the model man, the Head of all men. While he was here below, he was not a ruling Lord, but a suffering servant. He said to his disciples, "I am among you as he that serveth." Yet it is in him that the dominion once given to man is to be seen most clearly displayed.

9. *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor;*

We see that by faith. We see Jesus, not merely as God, but as the God-man exalted "far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion."

that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Thus lifting man back into the place where he first stood so far as this matter of dominion is concerned.

10. *For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their*

salvation perfect through sufferings.

Not that Christ needed to be made perfect in nature, but perfect in his capacity to be the Captain of our salvation, complete in all the offices which he sustains toward his redeemed people. He must be a sufferer that he may be a sympathizer; and hence his sufferings made him perfect.

11. *For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one:*

He who sets them apart and they who are set apart "are all of one." They are of one nature, and they have one destiny before them.

for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren

Oh, this blessed condescension of Christ! We are often ashamed of ourselves; alas! we are sometimes so base as to be ashamed of him; but he is never ashamed to call us brethren.

12. *Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*

The apostle was writing to Hebrews, and therefore he quoted from the books with which they were familiar. He here quotes the 22nd Psalm as the words of the Messiah.

13. *And again, I will put my trust in him.*

This is our Lord Jesus Christ putting his trust in the Father, overcoming by faith, even as we do. Oh, what a marvellous oneness there is here between Christ and his people! Well might the apostle say that "both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one."

And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.

There are some passages which we should never have thought related to the Messiah if the New Testament had not told us that they do. Hence I have no doubt that we much more often err in not seeing Christ in the Old Testament than in seeing him there, for there may be many other passages besides those which are supposed to speak of Christ which do speak of him.

14. *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same;*

We know what it is to be partakers of flesh and blood; we often wish that we did not. It is the flesh that drags us down; it is the flesh that brings us a thousand sorrows. I have a converted soul, but an unconverted body. Christ has healed my soul, but he has left my body still to a large extent in bondage, and therefore it has still to suffer; but the Lord will redeem even that. The redemption of the body is the adoption, and that is to come at the day of the resurrection.

But think of Christ, who was a partaker of the Eternal Godhead, condescending to make himself a partaker of flesh and blood—the Godhead linked with materialism; the Infinite, an infant; the Eternal prepared to die, and actually dying! Oh, wondrous mystery, this union of Deity with humanity in the person of Christ Jesus our Lord! Why did he become a partaker of flesh and blood, and die upon the cross?

That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

By his own death, Christ broke that evil power which brought death into the world with its long trail of woe. He did this, not by his example, not even by his life, but by his death. Therefore let those who speak slightingly of his atoning sacrifice see their folly, for it is through death that Christ destroys “him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;”—

15. *And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

He so took upon himself flesh and blood as to die in our nature, that thus he

might slay death, and might set us free from all fear of death. Do you not see that, if the representative Man, Christ Jesus, died, he also rose again, and that so also will all who are in him rise, too? If you are in him, you shall rise again. Therefore, fear not to lie down in your last sleep, for the trumpet shall awaken you, and your bodies shall be moulded afresh like unto his glorious body, and your soul and body together shall dwell in infinite bliss for ever. “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

16. *For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.*

Christ’s great mission was not to save angels, but to save men. Therefore he came not in the nature of angels, but in the nature of men.

17, 18. *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he it able to succor them that are tempted.*

And this is the reason why he suffered, and why he became a man capable of suffering, that he might be able to succor the tempted. It was for this that Christ left heaven, for this he was born of the virgin, for this he lived for this he died, that he might be “able to succor them that are tempted.”

Hebrews 3

1. *Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,*

What wonderful titles. “Holy brethren,” made brethren in holiness and made holy in our brotherhood—“partakers of the heavenly calling”—called of God from among the worlds. Our occupation and our calling henceforth is to serve the Lord.

consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;

Think much of Him. Remember who it is you follow, with whom you are brethren. If you think little of your Leader you will live but poor lives. Consider him, often think of him, try to copy him. With such a Leader what manner of people ought we to be?

2. *Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.*

See how our Lord Jesus Christ condescended to be appointed of the Father. In coming as a Mediator, taking upon himself our humanity, he “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant,” and being found in fashion as a servant, we find that he was faithful; to every jot and tittle, he carried out his charge.

3. *For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house.*

And Moses was but one stone in the house. Though in a certain sense he was a servant in it, yet in another, and, for him, a happier sense, he was only a stone in the house which the Lord Jesus Christ had builded. Let us think of our Lord as the Architect and Builder of his own Church, and let our hearts count him worthy of more glory than Moses; let us give him glory in the highest. However highly a Jew may think of Moses—and he ought to think highly of him, and so ought we—yet infinitely higher than Moses must ever rise the incarnate Son of God.

4. *For every house is builded by some man;*

The translators were obliged to supply the word man, and yet it is not correct. It is only half the matter; for behold Christ is God and man in one ever blessed person, and, therefore, was he counted worthy of more glory than Moses.

but he that built all things is God.

And Christ is God; and he is the Builder of all things in the spiritual realm—ay, and in the natural kingdom, too, for "without him was not anything made that was made." So he is to have eternal honor and glory as the one great Master-builder.

5, 6. *And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house;*

See the superiority of Christ to Moses; Moses is honored by being called the servant of God, but Jesus is the Son of God, and as Son, Master over his own house.

whose house are we,

Christ built the house; he laid us together like stones upon the great foundation, Moses is but a caretaker in the house.

if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope from unto the end.

Final perseverance is an absolute necessity of a child of God. We do not prove ourselves to be a part of the house if we move about like loose stones.

7, 8. *Wherefore*

Now comes a long parenthesis—

(as the Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

You are his house, give him rest, do not provoke him. If you belong to him be holy, do not grieve him. If you are his house be not defiled: surely he should dwell in a holy place.

9. *When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.*

That was a house in which it was hard to dwell. It had been Moses' prayer, "if thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence"; and the curtains had been spread for God's abode, and there was the holy place. But, oh! their provocations made it an uneasy house for the Lord of the house, which ultimately he left, rending its veil from the top to the bottom as he left it, for it was finished, and he had done with it.

10. *Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.*

They do err; they did always err in their heart. God is very tender to errors of judgment—errors of the head. But to err in the heart—this is the heart of erring, and very provoking to the Most High; and for it always to be so after having

tasted the bitter fruit of erring—after having known God's angers on account of previous errors—oh! this was sad! "They do always err in their heart." The foundation of sin often lies, however, in ignorance—"They have not known my ways." Ignorance can never be of any benefit to us. "That the soul be without knowledge is not good." But ignorance of God is the constant course of the errors of the heart. "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord," is a very gracious promise, and where it is carried out, there the errors are rectified by the grace of God.

11. *So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)*

What a dreadful warning this is to us! If God has had forty years' patience with you, hake heed, sinner, take heed, lest he swear in his wrath that ye shall not enter into his rest, for your entrance into that rest depends upon his good will and pleasure. He will have mercy of whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion. If, then, you provoke him to swear that you stroll not enter into his rest, into that rest you never can enter, for then the gates of hell are barred upon you, and the gates of heaven fast locked against you. Beware, then, lest ye provoke him.

12. *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, an departing from the living God.*

That is the thing that provokes God—unbelief; not so much the unbelief of the head, as the unbelief of the heart, when the heart will not yield to the plan of salvation, when men want to be saved by their own works, or else are indifferent altogether about whether they are saved or not. It is heart-unbelief that damns men. It is heart-faith that is the means of salvation. With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; but heart-unbelief leadeth to, and seals his, ruin.

13. *But exhort one another daily*

In opposition to their always erring, do you be always exhorting, and you cannot do that unless you are always watching that you do not err yourselves; but when, walking yourselves near with God, you exhort one another, it is well.

while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

If sin were to come to us labeled as sin, I trust we should reject it; but there is a deceitfulness of sin. It sometimes comes as a necessary action. We think that wisdom demands that we should sin a little sometimes to avoid some great evil; and in this way the soul gets hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Oh! if the devil would come in the shape of a devil, he would do little mischief, but he assumes the fashion of an angel of light, and there it is that he causes us so much sin and sorrow.

14. *For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.*

You are to hold fast, to hold on, and to hold out to the end; and the grace you need in order to do this is waiting for you if you will but look for it and daily live under the power of it.

15. *While it is said, today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.*

Twice over we are warned of this, to avoid hardness of heart. God save us from ossification of heart, petrifaction of heart.

16. *For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.*

All but two that came out of Egypt died in the wilderness; only Joshua and Caleb were faithful among the faithless found.

17. *But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness?*

See how the apostle speaks of them; he does not say that their bodies were

buried, but that their carcases fell, in the wilderness. Unbelief degrades us into beasts whose carcases fall beneath the poleaxe of judgment. Oh, that we might all be rid of unbelief, that degrading, desecrating, defiling, destroying thing!

18. *And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?*

Sinning and not believing seem to go together. The 17th verse asks the same question as the 18th, but the answer is different. “With them that had sinned,” says the 17th verse; “to them that believed not,” says the 18th verse. Want of faith brings want of holiness, and when we abide in the faith we abide in obedience.

19. *So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*

It was not the sons of Anak that kept them out, it was not the howling wilderness; it was nothing but their own unbelief. If you do not rest upon Christ as your salvation, you, too, shall hear God swear that you shall not enter into his rest.

Hebrews 4

1. *Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.*

If you avoid the very seeming of it, you will avoid the thing itself. Oh! that we were careful about this—that there was nothing that should give any reasonable fear to those who observed us, or to ourselves when we search our hearts, lest we should not enter into this rest.

2. *For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

It must be mixed with faith. There are many drugs that are of no value till they are mixed with something else; and the Word preached become of no value to a soul until it is mixed with faith in them that hear it.

3. *For we which have believed do enter it to rest.*

Faith brings us into this rest, even as unbelief shut them out.

As he said, As I have sworn in my wrath if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

That is God’s rest, the rest of a finished work, and into that rest many never enter. The work by which they might live for ever, the finished work by which they might be saved, they refuse, and so they never enter into God’s rest.

4, 5. *For he spoke in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again if they shall enter into my rest;*

There are many professing Christians who do not understand what it is to rest because the work of salvation is done; they do not even seem to know that the work is done. They understand not that dying word of the Lord Jesus, “It is finished.” They think there is something still to be added to his work to make it effectual; but it is not so.

6–8. *Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief again, he limiteth a certain day saying in David, Today after so long a time; as it is said, Today if ye will hear the voice, harden not your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.*

We read of this in the 95th Psalm, where David was urging those to whom he was writing to hear God’s voice, and not be like the unbelievers in the wilderness, so that the rest still remained to be entered upon by somebody. Joshua had not given them rest, or else David would not have spoken of entering into rest.

9, 10. *There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath cease from his own works, as God has from his.*

He says, “It is finished. I am no longer going to do my own works, I have done with them; I now trust the finished work of Christ, and that gives me rest. But as to all that wearied me before, and made life a continual task and toil, it is ended now.” God is not a cruel taskmaster to his people; he gives rest to those who trust in him, and some of us have entered into that rest.

11. *Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest lest any man fall after*

the same example of unbelief.

Let us not repeat the story of unbelieving Israel in our own lives, let us not live and die in the wilderness, but let us go in and take possession of the promised land, the promised rest, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

12. *For the word of God is quick, and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

This verse may be interpreted with reference to the incarnate Word or to the inspired Word, and they are so closely united and related to one another that we need not attempt to separate them, but see Christ in the Word, and the Word in Christ, and learn that both Christ and the Word do for us all that the apostle here declares.

13. *Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

However great a revealer the Word may be, however clear a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, the God who gave the Word is even more so.

14. *Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.*

Why should we let it go? Jesus has triumphed, he has entered into the glory on our behalf, the victory on our account rests with him; therefore let us follow him as closely as we can. May he help us if we are in the least dispirited or cast down, to pluck up courage, and press on our way!

15. *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we are,*

yet without sin.

How this ought to draw us to the Savior—that he was made like unto ourselves; that he knows our temptations by a practical experience of them; and though he was without sin, yet the same sins which are put before us by Satan were also set before him.

16. *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*

We have a Friend at court; our Bridegroom is on the throne. He who reigns in heaven loves us better than we love ourselves. Come, then, why should we hesitate, wherefore should we delay our approach to his throne of mercy? What is it that we want at this moment? Let us ask for it. If it is a time of need, then we see clearly from this verse that it is a time when we are permitted and encouraged to pray.

Hebrews 5

1. *For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sine:*

Notice that the high priests were taken from among men, not from among angels. Hence, our Lord Jesus Christ took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham." The Jewish high priests were ordained for men; they acted on behalf of men, and they stood in the place of men. So the Lord Jesus Christ stood in the room, place, and stead of his people, that he might offer to God for them two things—gifts—that is, such offerings as the Jew made when he presented the fine flour, and oil, and other bloodless oblations which were only intended for thanksgiving.

Christ offered thanksgiving unto his Father, and that offering was a sweet savor unto God. But beside those gifts, the priests offered sacrifices, and our Lord Jesus Christ did the same, for he was made a sin-offering for us, though he himself knew no sin.

2. *Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way;*

The marginal reading is, "Who can reasonably bear with the ignorant,"—that is, one who does not lose his temper even when they are very slow to learn what he teaches them. Having taught them nineteen times, and finding that they do not understand or remember the lesson, he is ready to teach them the twentieth time. He is one who will give them line upon line, and precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, because he has compassion on the ignorant.

Then there were other who tried the high priest far more even than the ignorant

did, they were those who erred from the right path, those who went out of the way, and who continued to do so even after many warnings and much earnest exhortation. The true priest must have patience with people of this sort.

for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

So all the high priests under the law were. They had to confess their own ignorance, they had to admit their own errings and wanderings, and therefore they could the more readily have patience with others. Our Lord Jesus Christ had neither ignorance nor sin of his own, but he has become so completely one with his people, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, that he can have compassion upon us, ignorant and out of the way as we may be. Are you distressed because you feel your own ignorance? Do you mourn because you have gone astray? You have to come to no angry Christ; you have to approach One who will be very gentle toward you. Come boldly to him, then; confess your folly, and expect the pardon that he is waiting to bestow.

3. *And by reason hereof he ought*

That is, the ordinary high priest, chosen from among men ought—

as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.

But our Lord had no sins of his own. Do not, therefore, think that he is less sympathetic with us because he had no sins; far from it. Fellowship in sin does not create true sympathy, for sin is a hardening thing. If there are two men, who are guilty partners in sin, they never really help each other, they have no true heart of kindness, either of them; but when the time of difficulty comes, each man looks to his own interest. The fact that Christ is free from sin, is a circumstance which does not diminish the tenderness of his sympathy with us, but rather increases it.

4. *And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.*

Men could not constitute themselves high priests; for the appointment was made by God alone.

5. *So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee.*

The text is quoted from the second Psalm, and it proves that Christ did not arrogate to himself any position before God. He is God's Son, not merely because he calls himself so, but because the Father says, "Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee." He took not this honor upon himself, but he was called of God, as was Aaron.

6. *As he saith also in another place,*

In the 110th Psalm.

Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

He does not assume the office on his own account, but it is laid upon him, He comes not in as an amateur, but as an authorized priest of God.

There is rich comfort for all believers in the fact that Christ is God's appointed and accepted High Priest. God ordained him to do what he has done, and is doing, and will do; and therefore it is impossible but that God should accept him and all his work.

7. *Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;*

This is to prove his infinite sympathy with his people, and how he was compassed with infirmity. Christ prayed. How near he comes to you and to me by this praying in an agony, even to a bloody sweat, with strong crying, and with weeping! In the days of his flesh, he not only offered up prayer, but "prayers and supplications,"—many of them, of different forms, and in different shapes—and

these were accompanied with “strong crying and tears.” Possibly, you have sometimes had a dread of death; so had your Lord—not a sinful fear of it, but that natural and perfectly innocent, yet very terrible dread which comes to a greater or less extent upon every living creature when in expectation of death.

Jesus also comes very near to us because he was not literally heard and answered. He said, “If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” But the cup did not pass from him. The better part of his prayer won the victory, and that was, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou writ.” You will be heard, too, if that is always the principal clause in your prayers; but you may not be heard by being delivered from the trouble. Even the prayer of faith is not always literally heard. God, sometimes, instead of taking away the sickness or the death, gives us grace that we may profit by the sickness, or that we may triumph in the hour of death. That is better than being literally heard; but even the most believing prayer may not meet with a literal answer. He “was heard in that he feared;” yet he died, and you and I, in praying for ourselves, and praying for our friends, may pray an acceptable prayer, and be heard, yet they may die, or we may die.

8. *Though he were a Son*

Emphatically, and above us all, “a Son,”—

Yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

He was always obedient, but he had to learn experimentally what obedience meant, and he could not learn it by the things which he did; he had to learn it “by the things which he suffered;” and I believe that there are some of the most sanctified children of God who have been made so, by his grace, through the things which they have suffered. We may not all suffer alike, we may not all need the same kind of suffering; but I question whether any of us can truly learn obedience except by the things which we suffer.

9. *And being made perfect,*

“What,” says one, “did Christ need to be made perfect?” Not in his nature, for he was always perfect in both his divine and his human nature; but perfect as a

Savior, perfect as a Sympathizer—above all, according to the connection, perfect as a High Priest.

he became the author of eternal salvation

Christ became the author of "eternal salvation," and the word "eternal" must mean without end; so that, if we once receive the salvation which Christ has wrought out, we are saved in time, and shall be saved throughout all eternity. Christ is the Author of this eternal salvation; not our good works, though our faith and our works become the evidences of our having received this eternal salvation.

unto all them that obey him;

Christ will not save those who refuse to obey him, those who will not believe in him; there must be an obedient faith rendered unto him, or else the virtue of his passion and death cannot come to us.

10. *Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.*

Then the apostle appeared to be going on to enlarge upon the Melchisedec priesthood, but he stopped. Perhaps he recollected what his Master said to his disciples on one occasion, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot hear them now." In a similar fashion Paul writes,

11, 12. *Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*

It is true of many Christians that they learn very little to any purpose, and always need to be going over the A B C of the gospel. They never get into the classics, the deep things of God; they are afraid of the doctrine of election, and of the doctrine of the eternal covenant, and of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God,

for these truths are meant for men of full age, and these poor puny babes have not cut their teeth yet. They want some softer and more childlike food. Well, it is a mercy that they are children of God; it would be better, however, for them to grow so as to become teachers of others.

13, 14. *For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

Let us all be praying the Lord to make us grow, that we may know more, and do more, and be more what the Lord would have us to be. A child is a very beautiful object, an infant is one of the loveliest sights under heaven; but if, after twenty years, your child was still an infant, it would be a dreadful trial to you. We must keep on growing till we come to the stature of men in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 6

In the previous chapter, Paul was writing to some who ought to have been teachers, but who needed still to be taught the first principles of the gospel; they were such babes in grace that they needed the milk of the Word—the very simplest elements of gospel truth—and not the strong meat of solid doctrine. The apostle, however, desires that the Hebrew believers should understand the sublimer doctrines of the gospel, and so be like men of full age who can eat strong meat. In this chapter he exhorts them to seek to attain to this standard.

1. *Therefore leaving the principles*

The rudiments, the elementary truths—

of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection;

Let us go from the school to the university, let us have done with our first spelling-books, and advance into the higher classics of the kingdom.

not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

Let us make sure that the foundation is laid, but let us not have continually to lay it again. Let us go on believing and repenting, as we have done; but let us not have to begin believing and begin repenting, let us go on to something beyond that stage of experience.

2. *Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

Let us take these things for granted, and never dispute about them any more, but go on to still higher matters.

3. *And this will we do, if God permit.*

We must keep on going forward; there is no such thing in the Christian life as standing still, and we dare not turn back.

4–6. *For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away*

If you read Dr. Gill, Dr. Owen, and almost all the eminent Calvinistic writers they all of them assert that these persons are not Christians. They say that enough is said here to represent a man; he is a Christian externally, but not enough to give the portrait of a true believer. Now, it strikes me they would not have said this if they had not had some doctrine to uphold; for a child reading this passage, would say, that the persons intended by it must be Christians. It the Holy Spirit intended to describe Christians, I do not see that he could have used more explicit terms than there are here. How can a man be said to be enlightened, and to taste of the heavenly gift, and to be made partaker of the Holy Ghost, without being a child of God?

The Apostle endeavors to urge the disciples forward, and make then run with diligence the heavenly race, looking unto Jesus. He tells them that it is not enough to have on a certain day, passed through a glorious change—to have experienced at a certain time, a wonderful operation of the Spirit; but he teaches them it is absolutely necessary that they should have the Spirit all their lives—that they should, as long as they live, be progressing in the truth of God. In order to make them persevere, if possible, he shows them that if they do not, they must, most certainly be lost; for there is no other salvation but that which God has already bestowed on them, and if that does not keep them, carry them forward, and present them spotless before God, there cannot be any other.

6. *To renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to*

themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

If all the processes of grace fail in the case of any professors, what is to be done with them? If the grace of God does not enable them to overcome the world—if the blood of Christ does not purge them from sin, what more can be done? Upon this supposition, God's utmost has been tried, and has failed. Mark that Paul does not say that all this could ever happen; but that, if it could, the person concerned would be like a piece of ground which brought forth nothing but thorns and briers.

7, 8. *For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.*

If, after having ploughed this ground, and sown it, and after it has been watered by the dew and rain of heaven, no good harvest ever comes of it, every wise man would leave off tilling it. He would say, "My labor is all thrown away on such a plot of ground as this, nothing more can be done with it, for after having done my utmost nothing but weeds is produced, so now it must be left to itself." You see, if it were possible for the work of grace in your souls to be of no avail, nothing more could be done for you. You have had God's utmost effort expended upon your behalf, and there remains no other method of salvation for you.

9. *But, beloved, we are persuaded better thing of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.*

Harsh as the apostle's words may seem, they are not meant for you who are really believers in Christ, and in whom the Holy Spirit has wrought a complete change of heart and life; Paul is not speaking of such as you.

10. *For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*

If you have proved by your works that the grace of God is within you, God will not forget you; he will not leave you, he will not cast you away. You know the contrast in the speech between different persons concerning this doctrine. One will wickedly say, “If I am a child of God, I may live as I like.” That is damnable doctrine. Another will say, “If I am a child of God, I shall not want to live as I like, but as God likes, and I shall be led by the grace of God into the path of holiness, and through divine grace I shall persevere in that way of holiness right to the end.” That is quite another doctrine, and it is the true teaching of the Word of God.

11. *And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:*

Keep it up; be as earnest today as you were twenty years ago, when you were baptized and joined the church: “Show the same diligence unto the end.” Still, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

12–15. *That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.*

Wherefore, brethren, you and I also are patiently to endure, to hold on even to the end, and God’s sure promise will never fail us.

16–18. *For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:*

Condescending to the weakness of human faith, he himself swears to what he declares, and thus gives us a gospel doubly certified by the promise and oath of

the everlasting God.

18. *That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:*

What is our anchor? It has two great blades or flukes to it, each of which acts as a holdfast. It is made of two divine things. The one is God's promise, a sure and stable thing indeed. We are very ready to take a good man's promise, but perhaps the good man may forget to fulfill it, or be unable to do so: neither of these things can occur with the Lord, he cannot forget and he cannot fail to do as he has said Jehovah's promise, what a certain thing it must be! If you had nothing but the Lord's bare word to trust to surely your faith should never stagger. To this sure word is added another divine thing, namely, God's oath. Conceive the majesty, the awe, the certainty of this! Here, then, are two divine assurances, which like the flukes of the anchor hold us fast. Who dares to doubt the promise of God? Who can have the audacity to distrust his oath? We have for our anchor two things, which, in addition to their being divine, are expressly said to be immutable—that is, two things which cannot change.

It seems a great change in this chapter from the sad tone at the beginning to the joyous note at the end; but, indeed, there is no contradiction between the two. Paul is but giving us two sides of the truth—both equally true—the one needful for our warning, the other admirable for our consolation. God will not leave you, my brethren, he has pledged himself by covenant to you, and he has given an oath that his covenant shall stand. Wherefore, be of good courage, and press forward in the divine life, for your work of faith and labor of love are not in vain in the Lord; so let us "lay hold upon the hope set before us:"—

19. *Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;*

Sailors throw their anchors downwards; we throw ours upwards. Their anchor goes within the veil of the waters into the deeps of the sea; ours goes within the veil of glory, into the heights of heaven, where Jesus sits at the right hand of God: "within the veil."

20. *Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.*

Here is one of its hold-fasts—God has promised to bless the faithful, he has declared that the seed of Abraham, namely believers, shall be blessed, and nude a blessing. Then comes the other arm of the anchor, which is equally strong to hold the soul, namely, the oath of the priesthood, by which the Lord Jesus is declared to be a priest for ever on our behalf; not an ordinary priest after the manner of Aaron, beginning and ending a temporary priesthood, but without beginning of days or end of years, living on forever; a priest who has finished his sacrificial work, has gone in within the veil, and sits down for ever at the right hand of God, because his work is complete, and his priesthood abides in its eternal efficacy.

This is a blessed anchor to the soul: to know that my Priest is within the veil; my King of righteousness and King of peace is before the throne of God for me, representing me, and therefore I am in him for ever secure. What better anchor could the Comforter himself devise for his people? What stronger consolation can the heirs of promise desire?

Hebrews 7

1, 2. *For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blest him: to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.*

His very names being instructive, Righteousness first, and Peace afterwards, as it is with our divine Lord, who has brought in everlasting righteousness, and speaks peace to guilty men.

3. *Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.*

Melchisedec just passed across the page; he has no predecessor, he has no successor. We see him in Scripture, and we know nothing of his descent we know nothing of his death; we only know that he was a priest of the Most High God; and this very silence about him is highly significant and instructive, far in this he is "like unto the Son of God, who abideth a priest continually." Now consider who this great man was, unto whom even "the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth part of his spoil." If Abraham, the father of the faithful, the friend of God, paid tribute to him, how great must he have been, how high his office!

5–7. *And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: But he whose descent is not counted from them*

receive tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.

Therefore, Abraham was less than Melchisedec: he could not bless Melchisedec, but Melchisedec could bless him. How great, then, was he! How far greater still is the Lord of ours of whom Melchisedec was but a type.

8–10. *And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.*

Thus the old priesthood, the Levitical and Aaronic priesthood, did homage unto the Melchisedec priesthood, which is greater still.

11. *If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron.*

This proves that the priests of the order of Levi were not sufficient: there was need of a still greater priesthood.

12. *For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.*

The law of the priesthood alters since the person of the priest, the character of the priest, and the very office of the priest had altered too.

13. *For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar.*

According to the belief of the Jewish people, the Messiah was to come of the

tribe of Judah, yet none of the house of David or of the tribe of Judah ever presumed to present themselves as priests of the order of God.

14. *For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.*

So there was an entire change of the priesthood, and of the law of priests.

15–18. *And it is yet far more evident: for that under the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.*

The old Levitical law is disannulled; it became weak and unprofitable; and now a higher and better dispensation is ushered in with a greater and undying priesthood.

19. *For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.*

That is all it did: it was a stepping-stone towards something better, “by which we draw near unto God.”

20–21. *And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest. (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, the Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)*

The Lord Jesus Christ was ordained to the priesthood, according to the hundred and tenth Psalm, in a manner distinct from all others. His ordination was unique, for neither Aaron, nor his sons, nor any of the priests of the tribe of Levi were ever ordained by an oath. Ceremonies most important, imposing, instructive, and

impressive were performed, but there was no oath. God gave promises to the house of Levi, but he expressly stopped short of anything like an oath to them, not because his promise can be broken, but because that promise was conditional, and must not be confirmed by an oath, as though it constituted a perpetual engagement. But our Savior is made a priest by an oath, and it is written, as if to make it exceeding sure, "The Lord hath sworn and will not repent"; not because God ever can or doth repent, or run back from his oath in any case, but for the confirmation of our faith in the immutability of his word it is expressly added, "He will not repent."

22. *By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better Testament.*

The word means both testament and covenant. God's covenant of grace has had the conditional side of it so completely fulfilled that it has virtually become a "testament," or a deed of free gift, in which the one party is a donor and the other has become simply a receiver. Though the economy of grace is a covenant under one aspect, under another it is no covenant, now requiring something from each of two parties, but it has become a testament or will as to its practical result.

23. *And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death; but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.*

I think they reckoned that there were eighty-three high priests in regular succession from Aaron to the death of Phineas, the last high priest at the siege of Jerusalem. One succeeded another, but this one goes on continually, for ever hath an untransferable priesthood. That word "untransferable" is nearer to the meaning than this "unchangeable." If any of you have old Bibles with the margin, you will see "hath a priesthood which cannot be passed from one hand to another," and the margin happens in this case to have the true rendering, "This man hath an untransferable priesthood."

Though Christ died unto sin once, he soon rose again from the dead, his body never having seen corruption. He died in his priesthood and for his priesthood, but never from his priesthood.

25. *Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

We want just that high priest who would live on throughout all the ages for ever to sustain his people, and do for them all they should need to have done for them, until time should have been no more.

26–28. *For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.*

Jesus Christ did not offer lamb or ram, bird or bullock; but "himself." That is a great word, and it means that his whole nature as man was offered up in death as an atonement for us—his whole nature as man, perfect and sinless, and indissolubly united with his Divine nature. I do not say that God died, nor would I put it quite so; but I will say that he who died was God, though man, and that "he offered up himself,"—the whole of himself—in sacrifice to God on our behalf.

28. *For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.*

There is our joy.

Hebrews 8

1-6. *Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: we have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.*

It is implied in the use of the word “better” that the ordinances of the ceremonial law were good in their place, but Jesus is better than the best of all visible things: the eternal Christ is better than the best of all the temporal arrangements which God has made for the good of man. How much better what heart shall conceive? “If the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.”

7. *For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.*

The old covenant was founded on the principle of merit; it was, “Serve God and

thou shalt be rewarded for it; if thou walkest perfectly in the fear of the Lord, God will walk well towards thee, and all the blessings of Mount Gerizim shall come upon thee, and thou shalt be exceedingly blessed in this world, and the world which is to come." But that covenant fell to the ground, because, although it was just that man should be rewarded for his good works, or punished for his evil ones, yet man being sure to sin, and since the fall infallibly tending towards iniquity, the covenant was not suitable for his happiness, nor could it promote his eternal welfare. But the new covenant is not founded on works at all, it is a covenant of pure unmingled grace; you may read it from its first word to its last, and there is not a solitary syllable as to anything to be done by us.

8-10. *For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:*

The old covenant was written on tables of stone; but the Lord said, concerning the new covenant, "I will put my law in their inward parts." The old law was hidden from sight when it was written a second time, and placed in the ark of the covenant; and God says of his new law, "I will write it in their hearts." They were always rebelling against God, and wandering away from him; but in this new, gracious covenant, he says, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

11. *And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.*

Though they differ as to their growth in grace, yet "they shall all know me, from

the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord."

12. *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*

If God has pardoned your sins, you will be sure to know him; there will be no mistake about that point. Men shrink back, and hide away from an angry God punishing sin, for they do not care to know him; but when he comes forth, dressed in the silken robes of love, to bestow free pardons upon the chief of sinners, then they know him.

13. *In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away. So the old covenant has vanished away, with all its types, and symbols, and sacrifices.*

As the morning mists dissolve upon the rising of the sun—as darkness flies away when the light shines—so has the covenant of works departed for ever; and, in its place, stands out the everlasting covenant of God's unmerited mercy to the most guilty and vile of the sons and daughters of men.

Hebrews 9

1. *Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.*

That is to say, a material sanctuary, a sanctuary made out of such things as this world contains. Under the old covenant, there were certain outward symbols. Under the new covenant, we have not the symbols, but we have the substance itself. The old law dealt with types and shadows, but the gospel deals with the spiritual realities themselves.

2. *For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary.*

Or, “the Holy Place.”

3. *And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all;*

All this was by divine appointment; the form of the rooms, the style of the furniture, everything was ordained of God; and that not merely for ornament, but for purposes of instruction. As we shall see farther on, the Holy Ghost intended a significance, a teaching, a meaning, about everything in the old tabernacle, whether it was a candlestick, or a table, or the shewbread.

4, 5. *Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;*

and over it the cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

Because it was not his main purpose at that time, and he was writing an important Epistle upon the most vital truths and it would not do to encumber it with too many explanations.

6–7. *Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:*

There could be no approach to God under the old dispensation without the shedding of blood, and there is no access to the Lord now without the precious blood of Christ.

8. *The Holy Ghost this signifying,*

It is from this sentence that I am sure that the Holy Ghost had a signification, a meaning, a teaching, for every item of the ancient tabernacle and temple; and we are not spinning fancies out of idle brains when we interpret these types, and learn from them important gospel lessons.

that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing:

It was necessary that you should take away the sacred tent, the tabernacle, ay, and take away the temple, too, before you could learn the spiritual meaning of them. You must break the shell to get at the kernel. So God had ordained. Hence, there is now no tabernacle, no temple, no holy court, no inner shrine, the holy of holies. The material worship is done away with, in order that we may render the spiritual worship of which the material was but the type.

9. *Which was a figure for the time then present,*

Only a figure, and only meant for “the time then present.” It was the childhood of the Lord’s people; it was a time when, as yet, the light had not fully broken in upon spiritual eyes, so they must be taught by picture books. They must have a kind of Kindergarten for the little children, that they might learn the elements of the faith by the symbols, types, and representations of a material worship. When we come into the true gospel light, all that is done away with; it was only “a figure for the time then present.”

in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;

All these sacrifices and ceremonies, although full of instruction, were not in themselves able to give peace to the conscience of men. The new and better covenant does give rest to the heart by the real and actual taking away of guilt, but this the first covenant could not do. It is astonishing that there should be any who want to go back to the “beggarly elements” of the old Jewish law, and again to have priests, and an elaborate ritual, and I know not what besides. These things were faulty and fell short of what was needed even when God instituted them, for they were never intended to produce perfection, or to give rest to the troubled conscience; so of what use can those ceremonies be which are of man’s own invention, and which are not according to the new covenant at all?

10. *Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.*

These ordinances were only laid upon the Jews—not upon any other people—and only laid upon them until the better and brighter days of reformation and fuller illumination.

11, 12. *But Christ*

Oh, how we seem to rise when we begin to get near to Him, away from the high priests of the Jews! “But Christ”—

being come an high priest of good things to come,

Things which were in the olden time “things to come,” are things present at this hour; for Jesus has brought to light the precious things of the covenant, which kings and prophets desired to see. Yet even now there are good things in the future. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” The Lord Jesus has brought all good things to those who believe in him, that they may rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

The Jewish high priests went once a year into the Holy of Holies. Each year as it came round demanded that they should go again. Their work was never done; but “He entered in once,” and only once, “into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” I love that expression, “eternal redemption”—a redemption which really does redeem, and redeems forever and ever. If you are redeemed by it, you cannot be lost; if this redemption be yours, it is not for a time, or for a season, but it is “eternal redemption.”

13, 14. *For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit of offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

Oh, what blessing it is to know that the conscience is quite at rest because of the purging wrought by Jesus’ blood! It is heaven begun below. We cannot serve God aright until we have been thus cleansed; nay, we dare not stand in that awful presence while the consciousness of sin is upon us; but when Jesus Christ saith to us, “Ye are clean,” then, “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Then have we “access with confidence” unto the Father through him.

15. *And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.*

When you come to deal with Christ, you have to do with eternal things. There is nothing temporary about Him, or about His work. It is “eternal redemption” that He has obtained for us, it is an “eternal inheritance” that He has purchased for us.

16, 17. *For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.*

Or, “Where a covenant is, there must also be the death of him who covenants, or of that by which the covenant is established.” Or read it as we have it in our version, for it seems as if it must be so, although we are loathe to give the meaning of “testament” to the word, since its natural meaning is evidently covenant: “Where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead; otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth”; or, if you will, while the victim that was to confirm the covenant lived, the covenant was not ratified; it must be slain before it could be thus effective.

18–22. *Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.*

There is no truth more plain than this in the whole of the Old Testament; and it must have within it a very weighty lesson to our souls. There are some who cannot endure the doctrine of a substitutionary atonement. Let them beware lest they be casting away the very soul and essence of the gospel. It is evident that the sacrifice of Christ was intended to give ease to the conscience, for we read that the blood of bulls and of goats could not do that. I fail to see how any doctrine of atonement except the doctrine of the vicarious sacrifice of Christ can give ease to the guilty conscience. Christ in my stead suffering the penalty of my sin—that pacifies my conscience, but nothing else does.

23, 24. *It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these;*

These things down below are only the patterns, the models, the symbols of the heavenly things; they could therefore be ceremonially purified with the blood which is the symbol of the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

But the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

He has gone within the veil;—not the veil of "blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work;" but within the veil that hides "heaven itself" from our eyes, and there he is "in the presence of God for us."

25, 26. *Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

What Aaron could not do by entering into the holy place year after year, Christ has done by entering into heaven once; and there is no more need of a sacrifice for sin, and they are grossly guilty who pretend to offer Christ over again. The

great work of redemption is finished; sin is put away, and there is no more remembrance of it. In the sight of God, Christ's one sacrifice hath completed the expiation of sin.

27, 28. *And as it is appointed unto men once to die,*

Notice how the apostle continues to introduce that important little keyword "once."

but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many;

There is no need that he should die again. His one offering has forever perfected all his people. There remains nothing but his final coming for the judgment of the ungodly, and the acquittal of his redeemed.

and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

Christ's second coming will be "without sin," and without a sin offering, too, wholly apart from sin, unto the salvation of all His chosen. He shall come to complete the salvation of those for whom his precious sacrifice was offered all those hundreds of years ago.

Hebrews 10

1. *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.*

This refers to the old ceremonial law, under which the Jews lived so long. They always had to go on, year after year, offering the same kind of sacrifices, because the work of atonement was never done perfectly; men were not cleansed or saved by it, so the process had to be constantly repeated.

2. *For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.*

There would have been no need to bring another lamb to be offered if the one which was presented had put away sin; there would have been no need of another day of atonement if the sacrifice on the one day had really made atonement for sin.

3, 4. *But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*

Your common sense tells you “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” Although rivers of such blood should continually be flowing, what efficacy could there be in them to put away the moral stain of guilt and transgression against God? Their blood was only a picture, an emblem, a type of far more precious blood—the shadow of the real atonement which was afterwards to be offered.

5. *Wherefore when he cometh into the world*

That is, the true Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, our Redeemer: "When he cometh into the world,"—

he saith

According to Psalm 40:6–8—

Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

By the work of the Holy Ghost within the Virgin Mary, the blessed body of Christ was "prepared" so that he ought be God and man in one person, and so might bring an offering acceptable unto God.

6, 7. *In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.*

That will had not been done, although myriads of sacrifices hail been offered. But Christ came really to do that will by offering himself as the one and only acceptable sacrifice.

8, 9. *Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.*

An end was made of the types and shadows of the ceremonial law, that the real substance might be introduced by Christ. Never imagine, dear friends, that the old Jewish ceremonial law is to drag on its existence, and to be intermingled with the Christian dispensation. Ah, no! As the shadows of the night vanish when the sun arises, as the lamps in yonder street are put out when daylight

returns, so was it with all the types and shadows of the ancient law when the great Antitype appeared.

10. *By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

Or, “once.” It can never be offered again. The presence of offering up the body and the blood of Christ in the mass is sheer profanity. It has been done once, and there is no need of a repetition. To suppose that it could be repeated, is to imply that it was incomplete on the first occasion; but it was not, for by it we are already sanctified.

11, 12. *And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;*

Oh, what a blessed doctrine this is—that the one offering of Christ has done what the tens of thousands of offerings under the old law never could accomplish! All the work of man is but the spinning of a righteousness which is undone as quickly as it is spun; but Christ has finished the seamless and spotless robe of his righteousness which is to last for ever. By his one sacrifice he has ended all the fruitless labor of the ages; and, now, as many of us as have believed in him have all the benefits of his perfect work. Having completed his great task:, he “sat down on the right hand of God;”—

13. *From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.*

“Expecting.” We are expecting something better than we have yet seen. “We were saved in hope,” We are expecting that which is yet to be revealed; and our covenant Head is expecting, too. This is the age of expectancy. We have not yet come to the fullness of the blessing that is ours in Christ Jesus. The mercy of God is at present; only in the bud; the fully-developed flower has yet to be seen. Christ is expecting; his saints are expecting; the whole creation is expecting.

14. *For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*

Or, “set apart.” He has fully saved all those for whom he died. His one sacrifice was so effectual that, by it, he has for ever put away the sin of the whole multitude of those that believe in him.

15-17. *Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us:*

And what more veritable witness can we have? That to which the Holy Ghost bears testimony must never be questioned by us.

for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sin and iniquities will I remember no more.

Oh, what a blessed covenant this is! Christ’s death has established a covenant of grace in which there is no flaw, and no possibility of failure, for the one Condition of the covenant has been fulfilled by Christ, and now it stands as a covenant of “shalls” and “wills” on God’s part from which he will never run back. It is not, “If they do this, and if they do that, I will do the other;” but it is all “I will.” “I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

18. *Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.*

If the sins themselves have gone, and God will remember them no more, no further sacrifice is required for them. What need have ye of cleansing if ye are so clean that God himself sees no sin in you? O glorious purgation by the atoning sacrifice of Christ! Rejoice in it, and praise the Lord for it for ever and ever.

19–22. *Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath*

consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

The Jew could not personally go up to the mercy-seat; he had to go there through his representative, the high priest, and we have Christ as our "high priest over the house of God," so we come to God through him. The Israelite could not pass through the veil which hid from public gaze the glory of the Shekinah, and Jesus Christ's humanity was a veil which some what concealed the glory of his Deity; but the flesh of Christ having been crucified, the veil has been rent, and now we may come right up to the throne of God without trembling; nay, we may come even with holy boldness and familiarity, and speak to God without alarm. Having such a privilege as this, let us not neglect it. It was denied to prophets and kings in the olden time; but now that it is vouchsafed to us, let us avail ourselves of it, and constantly "let us draw near" unto God "with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

23. *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering;*

Not only hold it, but hold it fast without wavering. Let us never have a question about it. God grant that we may have an unquestioning, unstaggering faith! To hold fast the profession of our faith, seems enough; but to hold it fast without wavering, is better still; and so we ought to do.

(For he is faithful that promised;)

God gives us no cause for wavering, for he never wavers. If he were an unfaithful God, we might naturally be an unbelieving people; but "he is faithful that promised." Therefore, "let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering."

24. *And let us consider one another to provoke into love and to good works:*

The Greek is, to stir each other up to a paroxysm of love. There is no fear that we shall ever go too far in our love to God; though it should cast us into a state of blessed excitement, yet would it be healthy for us so to live and so to work.

25. *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is;*

For Christian fellowship is helpful to us, and we are helpful to others by it. A Christian is not meant to be a solitary being. Sheep are gregarious, and so are the sheep of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us not be solitary pilgrims along the road to heaven, but join that glorious host of God's elect who march beneath the guidance of our great Master.

But exhorting one another:

It is not the work of the minister alone to exhort, but the brethren, and the sisters, too, should exhort one another, and seek to stir each other up in the faith and fear of God.

and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Does not every day bring us nearer to the coming of the Lord? Are there not many signs that these are the last days? Well then, so much the more let us stir each other up to love and to good works.

26, 27. *For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.*

Here the truth taught is that, if a Christian apostatizes, if he renounces his faith, and goes back to the world, it is impossible to reclaim him. A backslider may be restored, but anyone who should wilfully, after receiving the truth, reject it, has rejected the only Savior; he has rejected the only regeneration; and, consequently, he is without the pale of the possibilities of restoration. The

question is, “Will any true child of God so apostatize?” That question is answered in this very chapter; but the truth here taught is that, if he does, he goes into a state of absolute hopelessness.

28, 29. *He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment*

Can there be any sorer punishment than to die without mercy? Yes, there is, for there is eternal punishment: “of how much sorer punishment,”—

suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

For apostasy from Christ would amount to all this; and if that were possible, what grace would remain?

30. *For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompresses, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.*

God’s fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem. If a man tries nothing else, he will test his gold; and if no others shall be judged, yet certainly those will be who say that they are the Lord’s people. In that dread day, he will separate the goats from the sheep, the tares from the wheat, and the dross from the gold; his fan will be in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor; he will sit as a refiner of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi; he shall be like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap. Woe to those, in that day, who are a defilement to his Church, and an adulteration to the purity of his people!

31. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

What a terrible verse is that! It is a text that ought to be preached from by those

who are always saying that the punishment of the wicked will be less than, according to our minds, the Word of God leads us to expect it to be: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Reject your Savior, give up your hope in him, and there cannot be another name by which you can be saved, or another glorified by which you can be cleansed from sin.

32, 33. *In which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazing stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.*

The apostle is not expecting that any of them will ever go back to where they were before; he is persuaded that they will persevere even to the end. The very warning that he gives is a powerful preventive against apostasy. Now comes the exhortation: “Call to remembrance the former days.”

34, 35. *For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.*

Be like the brave Spartan who would never lose his shield, but would come home either with it or on it. “Cast not away your confidence.” You trusted in God in those early days, and nothing seemed to daunt you then. “Cast not away your confidence.” Rather, get more to add to it. Let there be no thought of going back, but may there rather be a distinct advance!

36. *For ye have need of patience*

Or, endurance—

That, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

To hold on, to continue to do God’s will—this is the task. To start, and to make a spurt now and then, is easy enough; but to keep on, is trying to every spiritual muscle; and only God can enable you to do so.

37, 38. *For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*

If there be a drawing back from faith, God can have no pleasure in us; but shall we draw back? That is the question, and here is the answer—

39. *But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition*

We who have believed in Jesus, we who have sincerely committed ourselves to his care, we who have been born again of the Holy Spirit, we in whom there is the real work of grace which God has pledged to carry on—“we are not of them who draw back unto perdition:”—

39. *But of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*

What a blessed truth is this! O Christian, as you see the danger that lies before you if you did prove to be an apostate, bless that sovereign grace which will not suffer you so to do, even as Paul wrote to the Philippians, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

Hebrews 11

This is the Arc de Triomphe erected to the memory of the heroes of faith, whose names are here recorded by the apostle's inspired pen, with a brief mention of some of their most memorable actions. If it had not been for their faith, which moved them to accomplish such valiant deeds, we might not have known anything about them.

1. *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,*

Though the "things" are only "hoped for" and "not seen" at present, the eye of faith can see them, and the hand of faith can grasp them. Faith is more mighty than any of our senses, or than all our senses combined.

2. *For by it the elders obtained a good report.*

"The elders"—that is, those who lived in the ancient times—wrought wondrous works by faith, and the "report" of them still encourages others to try to do likewise.

3. *Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.*

That is one of the earliest lessons of faith. We do not discover the secrets of Creation by mere reason, or the teachings of science; it is only by revelation that the marvellous story can reach us. Faith accepts the inspired declaration that God made all things, and that the things that are seen were made out of things that are

not seen, so that, after all, the foundation of everything is that which is not seen. The visible is but a dream; the things which are round about us are the transient things that shall all pass away. The things that are not seen are eternal, and shall abide for ever. The things which are seen were made out of the invisible, not out of things which are seen.

4. *By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*

You will notice that faith works differently in each one of these mighty men. It is the same living principle in all of them; but they are different men, and their faith is seen in very different circumstances. Faith is able to work in all manner of ways; it is good at everything. There is nothing that God calls us to do but faith can enable us to accomplish it. In Abel's case, we see that faith is grand at worshipping. Faith brings a right sacrifice; brings it in the right way; and speaks even after she is dead, for the blood of Abel cried out of the ground. Oh, that all of us might so live that, even out of our graves, there might come a voice speaking for God!

5. *By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

It is faith that muzzles the mouth of death, and takes away the power of the sepulcher. If any man, who had not been a believer, had been translated as Enoch was, we should have been able to point to a great feat accomplished apart from faith. It has never been so; for this, which was one of the greatest things that was ever done—to leap from this life into another, and to overleap the grave altogether—was only achieved "by faith."

6. *But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

Do we not sometimes fail in this matter? We try to come to God without believing that he is. We seem to pray to nothing, or to nobody, to a spectre, to a phantom. But that prayer which is accepted is prayer to a real God, of whom we are assured that he is. Do we not also fail in our belief as to the success of prayer? We do not fully recognize that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. He that prays, believing that God will be found by him, shall not pray in vain.

7. *By faith, Noah being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear,*

For there is a fear which comes of faith—a fear which is the strength of faith's arms, by which it moves us into action. It is not slavish fear. It is a fit, and proper, and reasonable fear, such as any man must have that believes God's threatenings. "Moved with fear."

prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Every act of faith condemns the world. Men who did not believe in God were, some of them, made to feel condemned, and others were condemned, even if they did not feel it, when they saw this holy man building a great ship upon dry land—a ship which he never would launch, but to which God would bring the sea, so that he should float over the waters deep, absolutely secure, whilst others perished. If you want to judge the wickedness of men, you need not set yourself to do it in the first place. Live a holy life, and you will judge the ungodly. I have heard it said that if there is a crooked stick, and you want to show how crooked it is, you need not waste words in description. Place a straight one by the side of it, and the thing is done directly. Noah condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

8. *By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*

That is, surely, the very masterpiece of faith. God bade Abraham go forth from his native land. He believed that God knew where he was to go though he did not himself know; so he left the direction of his wanderings entirely in the Lord's hands, and obeyed, and "went out, not knowing whither he went." We are not to ask for full knowledge before we will be obedient to the will of the Lord; but we are to obey God in the dark, even as Abraham did.

9. *By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:*

It is one of the great evidences of true faith for her to keep on, to continue, to abide, without any visible signs or tokens of what she knows is hers. The life of faith is wonderful, but so also is the walk of faith. Her walk has much about it that is mysterious; she knows that the land she treads on belongs to her; and yet, in another sense, she cannot claim a solitary foot of it. She knows that she is at home, even as Abraham was in his own land; yet like him, she knows herself to be a sojourner in a strange land, and is quite content to be so.

10. *For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

What a depth of meaning there is in those five words, "a city which hath foundations,"—as if all other cities had none! They come, and they go, as if they were molehills raised on the surface of the earth, or little mounds of sand made by the children's wooden spades upon the seashore, which the next tide will wash away. What vast numbers of cities have been destroyed already! We are constantly picking up the relics of them, but there is, blessed be the name of the Lord, "a city which hath foundations," a city founded on eternal power.

11. *Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.*

So that faith made the barren woman to keep house, and to be a joyful mother;

faith has caused our spiritual barrenness to bring forth abundantly.

12. *Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead,*

For he was ordered to be sacrificed. There sprung from one, and him as good as dead.

so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

Or if this text means Abraham, then his body was dead; and yet there sprang of him a seed "so many as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable."

13. *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

Though the promises could only be seen afar off, faith has such long arms that it embraced them, clung to them as loving relatives cling to one another, and would not let them go. So may we see the promises, and be persuaded that they belong to us, and embrace them as we clasp to our bosom those who are nearest and dearest to us!

14. *For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.*

They were strangers and pilgrims here, and they sought a country elsewhere. Every man wants a country; and if we have not one beneath the stars, we seek it somewhere else.

15. *And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.*

If they were seeking a country, might they not have gone back to their own country, from whence they came out? No; true pilgrims never think of going back; they know that, whatever difficulties and trials lie ahead of them, there are far greater ones in "that country from whence they came out." Bunyan's Christian was quite resolved not to go back to the City of Destruction whatever perils he might have to face on his way to the Celestial City.

16. *But now they desire a better country,*

Do you feel those desires within your heart? If not, surely you have no faith, for they that have faith in the better country desire it.

that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

He might be ashamed to be called their God if he had unsettled them, and made them long for another city, and yet had never prepared one for them.

The longings of the saints are but prophecies of the benediction of God. That which he makes us hunger for, is prepared. The bread of life shall be given us, and that country which he makes us seek, exists, and will be found of us. Wherefore keep your face that way, and let every longing and pining for the home country reassure you that this is not any dreamland, but that there is such a place.

17, 18. *By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed he called:*

The great trouble of Abraham was not his fatherly instinct, hard as it was to overcome that, and to be the slayer of his only son. His great difficulty was "How can God's promise be kept? He has given me a promise that in Isaac shall my seed be called, yet he tells me to offer up my son, how can this be?" But by faith he did it,—

19. *Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure.*

See how faith consecrates natural affection. See also how faith laughs at impossibilities. Abraham expects that God will raise his son from the dead, or do something equally wonderful, so that the promise he had given shall be fulfilled. It was not Abraham's business to keep God's promise for him; it was God's business to do that for himself, and he did it. You remember how Rebekah tried to make God's promise come true for Jacob, and what a mess she made by her plotting and scheming. When we give our attention to keeping God's precepts, and leave him to fulfill his own promises, all will be well. It was Abraham's part to offer up his son; it was God's part to fulfill the promise to his seed according to the covenant which he had made.

20. *By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.*

Looking into the future, although he was blind. Poor old man; lying upon his bed, with his eyes so dim that he could not tell one of his sons from another, he could yet look into the future, and bless his sons "concerning things to come." Oh, what sharp eyes faith has, even when the eyes of bodily vision have become dim! We may see far more by faith than we can by sight.

21. *By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*

Ah, that staff of his!—you know why he used it. I believe he loved it, because it made him remember the brook Jabbok where "he halted upon his thigh." It had long been his companion, for he said, "With my staff I passed over this Jordan;" but it became more than ever necessary to him after he had won that victory, and had also learned his own weakness. And now, as if in memory of the God who had blessed him, he leans upon the top of his staff, and blesses the sons of Joseph.

Now the chapter goes on with a long list of those who, by faith, wrought wonders.

22. *By faith Joseph when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.*

Faith touches all sense of things—even a funeral and bones, too, for faith is good at everything. She can sweep the house and seek diligently. She can enter heaven. She can go to the gates of death. Oh! for more of it!

23. *By faith Moses when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.*

Their faith made them hide him, for that faith laid hold of God, and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

24–26. *By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.*

Nothing but faith could have brought him to that decision.

27–29. *By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.*

For faith can do what unbelief must not attempt to do, and when unbelief tries to follow in the footsteps of faith, it becomes its own destroyer. You must have real faith in God, or you cannot go where faith would take you; but with faith you may go through the cloud or through the sea, and find yourself safe on the other side.

30. *By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.*

You could not see faith at work on those solid walls. Those huge ramparts and battlements seemed to stand fast and firm, yet they “fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.” No battering rams played upon them, but faith can do better work than battering rams or dynamite.

31. *By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*

What! Has the unchaste Rahab got in here with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph—the chaste Joseph? Yes. “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.” She hid them in her house, although that action would have cost her her life if they had been discovered; and though there was some deception mixed with her faith, which we need not dwell upon, yet God the Holy Spirit records her faith, and hides her fault.

32. *And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:*

There are some names, in this chapter, which we should hardly have expected to see there, the characters mentioned having been so disfigured by serious faults, and flaws, and failings; but the distinguishing feature of faith was there in every instance, and especially in the case of Samson.

Perhaps there was no more childlike faith, in any man, than there was in him; who but a man full of faith would have hurled himself upon a thousand men with no weapon in his hand but the jawbone of an ass?

There was a wondrous confidence in God in that weak, strong man, which though it does not excuse his faults, yet nevertheless puts him in the ranks of the believers. Happy is the man or woman who believeth in God. There were multitudes of others, beside those whom the apostle named—

33. *Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness,*

Is that as great an exploit as subduing kingdoms? Yes, that it is; to have, by faith, preserved a holy character, in such a world of temptation as this, is a far grander achievement than to have conquered any number of kingdoms by force of arms.

obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

Remember Daniel in the lions' den, and then ask yourself, "What is there that faith cannot do?"

34, 35. *Quenched the violence of fire,*

Think of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and remember how the fierceness of Nebuchadnezzar's fire was quenched for them.

escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong,

Do you notice how, every now and then, there is the mention of a feat which seems altogether beyond you; but then there follows one, in which you can be a partaker with these heroes and heroines of faith? It may be that you have never "quenched the violence of fire;" yet, often enough, it has been true of you that, by faith, "out of weakness" you have been "made strong." Others—

waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women

For faith works equal wonders in women as in men: "Women"—

received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection

Is this also a feat of faith? Yes; instead of showing their faith by putting their enemies to flight, they prove it by enduring all manner of tortures without shrinking.

36–38. *And other had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

This is the grandest roll of heroes that ever lived, and every one among them was a man or woman of faith. Faith made them so mighty. They were not greater, and in some respects not better than the rest of us, but they believed in God, they were firm in faith, and this became the basis of their conquering character, and thus their names are imperishably recorded here. They did not win the Victoria cross, but they bore the cross for their Lord, and he has honored them with an everlasting crown, which shall never be taken from them.

39. *And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:*

They did not live to see Christ come. They expected him; but, before the time when Paul was writing—before the actual coming of Christ, they had all passed away.

40. *God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.*

Is it not wonderful that we, who bring up the rear of the army of faith, are necessary to its completeness? It cannot be perfect without us. Ay, heaven itself will not be complete without us who are on the road to it. There would be empty seats in the holy orchestra, gaps in the sacred circle; so we who believe must all come there to make them perfect.

The new dispensation is necessary to complete the old, the New Testament is the complement of the Old Testament, and New Testament saints join hands with Old Testament elders. Let us all be worthy of our high pedigree; and may God grant that, if the saints of these latter days are to perfect the history of the Church of Christ, the end may not be less heroic than the beginning was!

A true poem should gather force as it grows, and its waves of thought should roll in with greater power as it nears its climax; so should the mighty poem of faith's glorious history increase in depth and power as it gets nearer to its grand consummation, that God may be glorified yet more and more, through all his believing children.

Hebrews 12

The apostle, having deserted the heroes of the faith, represents them as witnesses of the great race which Christens in all ages have to run. All through the chapter he keeps up the idea of the great Olympic games, and represents the saints as occupied with spiritual athletics in the presence of God, the angels, and glorified men.

1. *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.*

It was no excitement to run if there were no onlookers. The spur to the racers and wrestlers in the Grecian games was found in the eyes of those who gazed, in the clapping of their hands, in the shouting of their applause, as well as in the prizes that awaited the winners. Even our most private acts are looked upon by the millions of eyes of the great cloud of witnesses. Angels tell the news of how we run the great race, and they rejoice when we prosper.

Let us “run well” because so many are looking on at us, and just as the Grecian runner stripped himself of his clothes before he started, so “let us lay aside every weight,” the weight of sin, the weight of care, the weight of grief, the weight of worldliness, and everything else that might hinder us

Above all, let us beware of that sin which, like a trailing garment, might entangle our feet, and trip us up, for, if we fall, our opponent will certainly win the prize. Look well to that sin to which you are the most liable. We all have some besetting sin; let us especially be on the watch against that. While we keep all the wall with diligence, let us set a double guard at the most vulnerable point.

“And let us run with patience” or “endurance.” There is to be a combination of the active and passive in the Christian; he must be able to endure and yet be able still to work. “Let us run with patience,” run when we are out of breath, run when our bones ache, run when the prize seems to be further off than ever, and to be hidden from our eyes, run when the hot sun makes us athirst—still “let us run with patience the race that is set before us,” for it is he that endureth unto the end who shall be saved—not merely the starter in the race, for there are many who begin, and who begin not in the power of the Spirit of God, and who therefore do not persevere unto the end. By this sign shall the true children of God be known, that they run with endurance unto the end, “looking unto Jesus.”

2. *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith;*

Jesus is here delightfully called “the author and finisher of our faith.” In most of the arts, there is a division of labor, one man begins, and another completes; there is scarcely anything that is completed by one man; but the stupendous work of our salvation was not only commenced but it was also completed by the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Let us look unto him then. This will help us to persevere unto the end because he persevered to the end.

who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It was this joy that made Christ strong to endure in the day of his sorrow and joy must make you also strong to endure unto the end. He had the joy of anticipated victory. It “was set before him,” and so he “endured the cross, despising the shame.” He ran with a heavy cross on his back, and yet he ran faster than you or I have run: he ran because he had more joy than we have. So, my brethren, let us live in the joy of heaven, let us live in the joy of ultimate victory, and this will enable us to bear all the toils and trials of our present life.

3. *For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

Luther says, “When I think of what Christ suffered, I am ashamed to call anything that I have endured suffering for his sake.” He carried his heavy cross,

but we only carry a sliver or two of it; he drank his cup to the dregs, and we do but sip a drop or two at the very most.

“Consider him.” Consider how he suffered far more than you can ever suffer, and how he is now crowned with glory and honor; and so you are to be like him, descend like him into the depths of agony, that with him you may rise to the heights of glory.

4. *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.*

You have not shed your blood for Christ yet, for these are not martyr days, so can you be wearied and faint? If you run with the footmen, and they weary you how will you contend with horses? We ought to be ashamed of ourselves if we grow weary in a race that is so easy compared with that of the men and women who laid down their lives for Christ’s sake.

5. *And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:*

Both these states are wrong, either to think nothing of chastisement or else to faint under it; we are not to fall into either evil, but to keep the golden mean between them.

6. *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

Whenever we are under the scourging hand of God, how we ought to be cheered with the thought that this is a part of the heritage of the children. There are those who spoil their children. God is not one of them. He spares not the rod, and the more he loves, often the more he corrects. A tree of common fruit may be let alone so long as there is some little fruit on it, but the very best fruit gets the sharpest pruning; and I have noticed that in those countries where the best wine is made, the vine-dressers cut the shoots right close in, and in the winter you cannot tell that there is a vine there at all unless you watch very carefully. They must cut them back sharp to get sweet clusters. The Lord does thus with his

beloved. It is not anger. Afflictions are not always anger. There are often tokens of great love.

7. *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*

The apostle's intention is to harden us to any suffering that may come to us in this mortal life. He does so first by showing us that we are like wrestlers and racers, and that we must expect to endure much hardship if we are to win the crown. We are to "endure hardness." The crown cannot be won without it. You know what men will do to win an earthly crown; but the heavenly crown is an immortal, unfading one; so how much more may be expected of you in the way of patient endurance in your heart to win it.

Then he changes the figure, and says, "You are the sons of God, and that is the reason why you are admitted to the arena where these sacred strugglings take place, and as you are the sons of God, you must endure the chastening rod as a part of your training." Dear brethren in Christ, will not each one of you thankfully accept it, and say, "As this is one of the evidences of my sonship, I will thank God for every cut of the rod, and bless his holy name for every twig of it."

8. *But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*

He does not say, "then are ye alone." He is speaking about those who profess to be the children of God, writing concerning those who claim to be members of the Lord's family, and he stigmatizes with one of the most dreadful of names those who may escape without chastisement; but, brethren who among us would have the pleasure of carnal ease if with it we are to have the shame of spiritual illegitimacy?

9. *Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*

Should we not give him reverence when we are chastened, instead of murmuring and complaining against him, thus calling him to account at our judgment-seat? Oh, yes let us be in willing subjection to him, and the more willingly subject we are, the less painful will the chastisement be. Our bitterest sorrow will be found at the root of our self-will; and when our self-will is gone, the bitterness of our sorrow will be past.

10. *For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure;*

There was, possibly, much of their own temper mixed with their chastisements, they let off their wrath upon us sometimes by the medium of chastisement, but God never chastens his children merely out of anger.

but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Is there no way for us to "be partakers of his holiness" but through chastening? It would seem so from the wording of this verse. The Lord, as our loving Father, makes use of the rod that he may make us to be truly holy.

11. *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous:*

It would not be chastening if it were a joy to us; it is necessary, in order that it may be chastening, that it should be grievous.

nevertheless afterward

Oh, what melodious music there is in those two words to ears and hearts that are divinely taught to appreciate it! "Nevertheless afterward"—

it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Blessed is that chastening which being fruitful in us makes us also fruitful. It brings forth the fruit of righteousness; not natural, and therefore impure fruit, but fruit such as God himself may accept—holiness, purity, patience, joy, faith, love, and every Christian grace.

Note that this righteous fruit is peaceable. None so happy as tried Christians, afterwards. No calm more deep than that which precedes a storm. There is a lull in the atmosphere after the hurricane which is not known at other times.

12. *Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;*

Let not your service to God slacken. Lift up to God that which was idly hanging down through despondency. Let not your prayers grow weak through grief, but strengthen the feeble knees.

13. *And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

The Apostle cheers up those who are tried, with the reflection that the good which will come out of their trouble will abundantly recompense them. They are not to expect to see that good at once. It will come afterwards—not yet. No reasonable man expects the harvest at the same time that he sows. You must wait a while—bear with patience—have confidence in God—and all your trials will end well.

14. *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:*

The holy God can only be seen by holy eyes. He must make us like himself before we can see him.

15. *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God;*

“Lest he should come short of the grace of God, and as it were fall back. Paul is

still keeping to his illustration drawn from the wrestling at the Olympic games. Sometimes, the wrestler gave his opponent a back fall, and down he went, and so lost the crown; beware lest such a fall should happen to you in your spiritual wrestling.

lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

For, alas! under the means of grace, there are many who do “fail of the grace of God.” They get something that they think is like grace, but it is not the true grace of God, and they ultimately fall from it, and perish. What we need is to have unfailing grace, and power so to hold on that, at the last, we may inherit the crown of life, but for this we must look diligently, for the best of us has shrewd cause to suspect himself, and in church fellowship, we ought to be very watchful lest the church as a whole should fail through lack of the true grace of God, and especially lest any root of bitterness springing up among us should trouble us, and thereby many be defiled.

16. *Lest there be any fornicator*

Fornication was the special sin of that age: in fact, so common was it that the heathen did not reckon it to be a sin at all. Knowing of the tendency to licentiousness in all around them, Paul specially warned the Hebrew Christians against that horrible evil.

or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

Those who seek the pleasures of the flesh rather than the pleasures of a higher world are here put side by side with Esau. Now Esau sold the right to his future heritage for a present mess of pottage, and many there are who do something very like that—sell their souls for a little Sunday-trading, or for a little carnal company, a little of that fool’s mirth which is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. They are willing to damn themselves to all eternity because they cannot bear the jeers and sneers of a ribald world.

17. *For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought at carefully with tears.*

He never repented of his sin, but only of the consequences of it. He never sought pardon of God, but only sought to inherit the blessing. And there will be many, who have lived for this world, and loved it, who, when they wake up in another world, will begin to seek the blessing, but they will be rejected. This may happen even in this world. If they only seek to die the death of the righteous, and seek not the pardon of their sin, they shall hear the Lord say to them, “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh.”

18. *For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched,*

God came upon Sinai with his law, and the dread mount became a type of what the law would be to us. It has given us a grand idea of holiness, but it has not offered us a pathway thereto, nor furnished a weary heart with a resting-place, nor supplied a hungry soul with spiritual food. It can never be the place where congregated multitudes erect a city for themselves, and a temple for the living God: it is not the shrine of fellowship, but the throne of authority and justice.

and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest.

Sinai was altogether on a smoke; innumerable lightnings flashed forth around the summit of the hill, and Jehovah revealed himself in flaming fire.

19. *And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:*

Clarion notes most clear and shrill rang out again and again the high commands of the thrice-holy God. There sounded out a voice, a voice which was so terrible

that they asked that they might not hear it again. They cowered down under it, like poor, frightened children, terrified by the penetrating sound. They could not endure another word; they begged that the voice would be silent.

20. *(For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:*

The spirit of the old law was reverent distance. Moses and here and there a man chosen by God, might come near to Jehovah; but as for the bulk of people, the command was, “Draw not nigh hither.”

21. *And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)*

We have not come to that mount of terror, for we are not under the law but under grace; we have come to a very different place from that.

22. *But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,*

We gather to quite another center, even unto the palace-crowned steep of Sion. There David dwelt of old, and there David’s Lord revealed himself. The hill of Sion rose above the city of Jerusalem, and the two together formed the favored spot where Jehovah deigned to dwell in solemn state in the midst of his chosen nation; “for the Lord hath chosen Sion; he hath desired it for his habitation.” This is a type of the dispensation in which the Lord comes to man in a vision of peace, and manifests himself in forgiving grace. The Lord dwells with men in the person of the man Christ Jesus, and we come to him and find our habitation in him in all generations.

and to an innumerable company of angels,

What mighty spirits, what flaming spirits, what pure spirits, what glorious spirits they are; and we have communion with them! We have come to an innumerable

company of angels. We do not always realize it as we should; but these loving spirits are about us as surely as they were around Jacob in his dream. If our eyes were opened we should see horses of fire and chariots of fire round about the Lord's servants. "Millions of spiritual creatures walk this earth, both when we wake and when we sleep." God comes to us by them: "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly." Angels contend against evil spirits, and are our defenders. This, then, is our position: we are come to the countless hosts of our Father's messengers, and not to devouring flame.

23. *To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven,*

We this day, in loving fellowship with the church, are come to the great gathering of God, the holy convocation of saints of every tongue, the central home of all the tribes of his great family.

and to God the Judge of all,

This is perhaps the most joyous of all the clauses of the passage. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." What a contrast to the darkness of the law is a reconciled God! We are standing today in the presence of that great God who looks upon his people with delight, and awards to them their several crowns.

and to the spirits of just men made perfect.

What more is there for them to do? They are perfect, they have fought the fight, they have run the race, they are crowned, they are full of ecstatic bliss, the light of God is on their brows, the glory of God is reflected from their faces; everything like tempest is far gone from them; they have reached the fair haven, and are tossed with tempest no more.

24. *And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

The center around which we gather in these days is not Sinai with its thunder

and its fire; it is the cross; nay it is heaven; it is the enthroned Savior; it is the great Mediator of a better covenant than that of which Moses came to speak. We gather there, and we make no a part of that vast throng that now surrounds that center. Oh! that we while we hear the sweet voice of the gospel, may lend it a willing ear, and may we not be among the number of those who reject the voice that speaks from heaven to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

25. *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:*

When Moses spake in God's name, it was no light thing to refuse such an ambassador. Still, Moses was but a man. Though clothed with divine authority, yet he was but a man and a servant of God. But Jesus Christ is God by nature. See that ye refuse not him who is of heavenly origin, who came from heaven, who is clothed with such divine powers, that every word he speaks is virtually spoken from heaven, and who, being now in heaven, speaks through his ever-living gospel directly out of the excellent glory.

26, 27. *Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

All that is eternal must, of course, endure for ever. The everlasting covenant, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God," the purchase of the Savior's blood, the work of the Holy Spirit—all these shall stand fast for ever, they can never be shaken." The immutable Word spoken by the mouth of the unchanging God, liveth and abideth for ever!

28, 29. *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire.*

The God who gave the law on Sinai has never changed: the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of Moses who overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in the Red Sea, and slew Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and the multitude of murmurs, idolaters, and fornicators in the wilderness—"this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

Many people say, "God out of Christ is a consuming fire:" but Paul wrote nothing of the sort. It is "our God"—and he is not "our God" except as we view him in Christ—who is "a consuming fire."

How greatly we ought to reverence him, and how earnestly we ought to ask of him that the divine fire may burn up everything in us that ought to be consumed, that only that may remain which will first endure the great shaking, and which will afterwards endure the great burning. May the Lord graciously grant to each one of us that grace which shall abide the fire!

Hebrews 13

This is a practical chapter at the close of this most instructive Epistle.

1. *Let brotherly love continue.*

It is supposed to be there already; let it continue, not only love of a common kind, such as we are to have to all men, but that special “brotherly love” which Christians bear to one another as members of one family.

2. *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

Abraham did so, and Lot did so; they thought they were entertaining ordinary strangers, and they washed their feet; and prepared their food, but it turned out that they had entertained angels. Some people will never entertain angels unawares, for they never entertain anybody. May we be given to hospitality, for that should be part of the character of saints.

3. *Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them;*

Christian people who have got into trouble through being Christians persons who have been shut up in prison for righteousness’ sake; there were many such in Paul’s day. Sympathize with them, says the apostle, “as bound with them.”

and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

So that, if you are not now in adversity, you may be before long. Therefore, have a fellow feeling for those who are in trouble. If you are not yourself distressed,

you are not out of the reach of such a thing; therefore be tender towards your afflicted brethren.

4. *Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.*

And terrible will be their doom when God does judge them. They may think that, because they sin in secret, therefore they shall escape punishment; but it shall not be so. Whether men judge them or not, God will judge them.

5. *Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*

There is a fortune for you, that is a pension to fall back upon. You may very well be content to leave your temporal concerns in the hands of God, for he hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Why, if you believe that one promise of God, he will be better to you than ten thousand friends who promise to provide for you! The Provider in heaven is better than any provider on earth. A beautiful motto is that of the old house of Chester, "God's providence is my inheritance."

6, 7. *So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me. Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation:*

It seems that there were special persons, who were leaders in the Church of God, who were to be remembered, and thought upon, and considered. They were set apart for this world: "them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God." They were leaders among the saints, and Paul would have the rank and file imitate them in their confident trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

8. *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*

We are one moment holy, kept by the power of God; we are the next moment sinning, led astray by our own lusts; but our Master is for ever the same; pure, and never spotted; firm, and never changing—everlastingly Omnipotent, unchangeably Omniscient. From him no attribute doth pass away; to him no parallax, no tropic, ever comes; without variableness or shadow of a turning, he abideth fast and firm.

Should he come on earth to visit us again, as sure he will, we should find him the same Jesus; as loving, as approachable, as generous, as kind, and though arrayed in nobler garments than he wore when first he visited earth, though no more the Man of Sorrows and grief's acquaintance, yet he would be the same person, unchanged by all his glories, his triumphs, and his joys. We bless Christ that amid his heavenly splendours his person is just the same, and his nature unaffected.

9. *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.*

Do not put yourself into every man's hand to let him play with you as he pleases. The fish that never nibbles at the bait is not likely to be caught by the hook, and he who will not give heed to "divers and strange doctrines" is not likely to be carried away in the net of heresy.

For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

Some in the apostle's day made religion to consist almost entirely in observing certain rules as to what they ate and what they drank. "Be not so foolish," says Paul, "there is something better than that; seek to have your heart established with grace."

10. *Whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.*

They have nothing to do with it, for they are still under the old ceremonial law; and those whose religion consists in outward rites and ceremonies can never eat of the spiritual altar whereat spiritual men eat, for they do not understand the

scripture, and they still serve the Mosaic tabernacle.

11, 12. *For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, thus he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.*

When the high priest offered the sin-offering, because it typified sin, it was so obnoxious to God that it might not be burned upon the great altar, but it was always burned without the camp, to show God's detestation of sin, and his determination not only to put it away from himself, but also to put it away from his Church.

Now, when our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to be our Sin-offering, it behoved him also to be put outside the camp. Christ must not be slain in a tumult, he might not die in the city; and when he was delivered into the hands of the Romans, they had not a place of execution within the city, but one outside the camp, that by dying without the gate, he might be proved to be the sin-offering for his people.

13. *Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.*

Outside the gate, was the place of Christ's atoning death. "Without the camp," is the place where his servants will find themselves most at home. To this day the Christian's place is not to tarry in the camp of worldly conformity, hoping, "Perhaps I may aid the movement for reform:" it is not the believer's duty to conform to the world and to the world's ways, and say, "Perhaps by so doing I may gain a foothold, and men's hearts may be the more ready to receive the truth." No, from the first to the last day of the Church of God, the place of witness is not inside, but outside the camp; and the true position of the Christian is to go forth without the camp, bearing Christ's reproach.

14. *For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.*

We cannot stop in the condemned city; we must be outside its walls. Our Lord

went out of the city to die, and we must go without the camp to live. Do not look for a continuing city here. Do not build your nest on any one of the trees of earth, for they are all marked for the axe, and they will all have to come down, and your nest too, if you have built upon them.

15. *By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.*

If you are believers in Christ, you are God's priests, and this is the sacrifice that you are continually to offer—the fruit of your lips, giving thanks to God's name.

16. *But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

We are to do good to others, to communicate of our own good things to those who need them, and to do this at some sacrifice to ourselves, "for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

17. *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.*

I know some Christians who would think it dreadful to obey ecclesiastically. "Obey them that have the rule over you," is not a pleasant Scripture to them. They will have no pastor. Nobody ever was set over them. I am sure I am devoutly grateful that I was not, for it would be a very uncomfortable office to guide such unruly spirits.

Obedience is one of the lessons of wisdom which this age needs to learn, for everybody must be master or mistress nowadays. We all desire to rule, and we all feel that we could do it far better than the present leaders are doing it. He who has the least wisdom, and has failed in business half a dozen times, is the very person who believes himself to be the most fitted to be Prime Minister. We do not love obedience; but we have to learn it.

18, 19. *Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.*

The movements of God's servants may be controlled by prayer. You cannot tell how much of blessing will come to your own souls, through the ministry, if you are in the habit of praying about it. The man who comes up to God's house, having prayed for God to bless the preacher, is not likely to go away unprofited.

20, 21. *Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant*

The God of peace has also graciously restored peace and reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, but it has been by the putting away of sin, for while sin remained peace was impossible. "The blood of the everlasting covenant," of which the text speaks, was the sealing of a covenant of peace which God made between himself and man; for of old were there thoughts of peace in the mind of God towards his chosen. In the fullness of time the gift of Christ and his atoning death was the actual establishment of peace, for he hath made peace by the blood of his cross. The bringing back of the Lord Jesus from the dead was the seal of his perfected work, and consequently of our peace and ultimate perfection in holiness.

make you perfect in every good work to do his will,

The original Greek word properly means to reset a bone that is dislocated. The meaning of the text is this; by the fall all our bones are out of joint for the doing of the Lord's will, and the desire of the apostle is that the Lord will set the bones in their places, and thus make us able with every faculty and in every good work to do his will.

working in you that which is ever pleasing in his sight,

When the Lord makes thee fit for every good work, yet thou wilt do no good

work unless he worketh it in thee. Even he who is best adapted for the performance of virtue and holiness, yet does not perform these things till the Lord worketh in him to will and to do of his own good pleasure.

through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

That which we do even when the Lord works in us we only do through Jesus Christ. We are nothing without our Lord, and though we do what is acceptable in the Lord’s sight, yet it is only acceptable through Jesus Christ. What nothings and nobodies we are! Even when the Lord does the most for us that can be done, so that we dwell in his sight and our actions become well pleasing to him, and he looks upon us with delight, yet even then we are nothing. It is the Lord that hath wrought all in us, even the God of peace, who is all in all.

JAMES

James 1

1. *James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

He was an apostle, and he was the Lord's brother, yet he mentions not these greater things, but he takes the lowly title, in which, no doubt, he felt the highest honor, and calls himself "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Happy is that man who serves the Lord, whose whole life is not that of an independent master of himself, but of one who is fully submissive to the divine command.

To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

According to the teaching of some in the present day, the apostle should have said, "To the two tribes, and the ten that are lost," but he does not say so, nor does Scripture say so. "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting."

2. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

Or, "trials." This is a strange thing to say, is it not? Should we not count it great joy when we escape from trial? Perhaps so; but we are expressly told to count, or reckon, it all joy when we fall into divers trials. Have you never known what it is, in times of peace and quietness, to feel as if you missed the grandeur of the

presence of God? I have looked back to times of trial with a kind of longing, not to have them return, but to feel the strength of God as I have felt it then, to feel the power of faith, as I have felt it then, to hang upon God's powerful arm as I hung upon it then, and to see God at work as I saw him then. I think the mariner at home must sometimes feel a kind of longing once more to enjoy a storm on the ocean, and to see how the good ship rides on the billows' crest. Life gets fiat sometimes while all goes smoothly, and we need even the variety of a trial to bring us to close dealing with our God. It is so much for our good to be tried, it is so much for the glory of God that we should be tried, that we will read the verse again, and note what the apostle says: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials." Be like the soldier who is not afraid of the shot and shell, and the turmoil and strife of the battle.

3, 4. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

You need to grow; you will not grow without trials. You need to learn; you will not learn without affliction. It is God's school for you. Be thankful, therefore, when these afflictions come. They are the rumbling waggons of your Father, in which he sends you choice treasure. They are black ships that come from afar, loaded with precious things. But mind that you do get this patience; and that, when you have it, you have still more of it: "Let patience have her perfect work."

5. *If any of you lack wisdom.*

Ah, James, you need not say, "If any of you lack wisdom," for we all lack it! We are all poor, foolish creatures: "If any of you lack wisdom."

5. *Let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

We are so apt, when we give anything, to diminish the value of it by some unkind remarks, but God doeth not so; he giveth, as he bids us give, with simplicity. There is the gift, and he will not detract from it by upbraiding us.

Why, some will upbraid the poor while they help them: “How came you to be in such a condition?” But God saith not so to us; the gift is given in pure liberality, without any upbraiding. Wisdom is a gift. The best wisdom is not that which we acquire by study, but that which is the distinct gift of God in answer to prayer.

6. *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*

Now on the shore, now sinking back, now driving fearlessly ahead, then sinking down. This is not the kind of man that prevails with God in prayer, it is not the kind of faith we ought to have in God a faith that is very brilliant on the Sunday, and very dull on the Monday: a faith that is triumphant after a sermon, but which seems to be defeated when we get into actual trouble.

7. *For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord.*

He may receive something of the Lord; but he may not think that he shall. It may come as a spontaneous gift of sovereign grace; but we have no right to expect an answer to prayer when we pray in a wavering style.

8. *A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.*

He sees double; he runs after two objects; and therefore he staggers across the street: he “is unstable in all his ways.”

9. *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:*

Being lifted up by the grace of God to sit among the princes of Israel.

10. *But the rich, in that he is made low:*

Hard work this! Still, the child of God should rejoice in it, for now that he is stripped of earthly things, be finds his all in God.

10, 11. *Because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.*

Oh! to be delivered from all glorying in such uncertain riches. Whatever God gives you, he may soon take away from you; if he takes it not away, he may take away your power to enjoy it: it is poor, slippery stuff at the very best. Rejoice that you have something better, something lasting.

12. *Blessed is the man that endureth, temptation:*

Or, "endureth trial." Blessed is the man who is tried and tested, and who lives through it; who conquers, notwithstanding all the battle and struggle through which be passes. We should say, "Blessed is the man who is not tried;" but it is not so. He who, bearing the heavy load, receives gracious strength to sustain him under it, gets a greater blessing than the man who escapes the burden.

12. *Blessed is the man thus endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*

For that is the purpose of our trials, that we should be made to love him more, and love him better. This is that grace which shall win "the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." It is promised to love, but it is given to endurance. It is the love of God which spies out our love and rewards it, but rewards it partly by trying it, and then ultimately by bringing forth the stephanos, the crown. Men ran for a crown in the Greek games, and could not win the crown without the running. So doth God give to them that run a crown, but not without the running. He giveth to them, first, the privilege of suffering for his name's sake, and then of being rewarded for it.

13. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.*

That is to say, if God permits or sends temptation to any man, it is not an inducement to sin. In that sense, God tempts no man. Those temptations which are said to come from God are trials or tests. In that sense, God does tempt all his people, even as it is written, “God did tempt (or, prove) Abraham.” He tries and tests them, that they may see, and that he may see, whether their faith dud their profession be genuine or not, even as the Angel of the Lord said to Abraham, after the trial of his faith, “Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.”

God tries men. God does not, in the sense in which the word is here used, tempt men. Satan tempts: God tries. But the same trial may be both a temptation and a trial; and it may be a trial from God’s side, and a temptation from Satan’s side, just as Job suffered from Satan, and it was a temptation; but he also suffered from God through Satan, and so it was a trial to him.

14. *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

This is the wanton harlot that deceives the heart of man: his own desire grown strong and hot till it cometh to be a lusting: this draws a man away; it baits the hook, and man swallows it and is thus entrapped and enticed.

15. *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

There is the history and pedigree of sin. God save us from having any connection with the desire to sin, lest from that we be led into sin, and then from sin descend into death.

15. *Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

There you see the egg, and the larva, and the fall-grown fly of sin: “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” That is the pedigree of sin; it is born of lust, and it brings forth dust. Any sin, whatever it is, if we cling to it and love it, will bring forth death; rest assured of that. The only hope we can have of eternal life

is by being parted from sin. That must be taken away from us; for there shall never enter into heaven anything that defileth. We have, from day to day, to fight against sin, till it is utterly put away from us.

16. *Do not err, my beloved brethren.*

Do not err about anything; but, especially, do not err about this matter of temptation, where you may so easily make a blunder: “Do not err, my beloved brethren.”

17. *Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights,*

Ascribe all evil to yourself, to the world, or to Satan; but ascribe all good unto God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift”—every grain of goodness, every trace of excellence that there is in the world, comes from him; but no evil ever comes from him.

with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

God never turns from us; nor, in any way whatever, changes; he is the same God, ready always to bless us, ready to save us tonight as much as any other Thursday night. Ah, dear friends, what variableness we have!

The other day we were frost-bitten, and crying out with the cold; and now tonight, perhaps, we feel dull, and stupid, and heavy, because it is so hot.

Yet, what a mercy it is that God has no variableness, neither shadow of a turning; and we may come to him tonight, and say, “Lord, visit us as thou art wont to do! Revive us and refresh us. Put us into a lively, brisk, happy frame of mind tonight, and send us on our way rejoicing.”

18. *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.*

It is a very delightful idea that we are presented to God as “a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” There is a whole harvest behind us, as Paul also reminds us in Romans 8:19–21: “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

19. *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear,*

It is a great thing to have an open car. Some are very slow to hear, especially to hear the Word of God, and the voice of God speaking that Word. Oh, to have our ears unstopped, that we may hear every syllable of truth gladly, cheerfully, retentively! God grant us that swiftness of hearing tonight!

Slow to speak, slow to wrath:

For, sometimes, when men are very quick to speak, they are also very quick in other respects as well; and volubility may be accompanied by a tendency to heat or passion: “Slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

20. *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*

Satan does not cast out Satan. Anger does not overcome evil. We may think we do well to be angry; but that will very seldom be the case.

There is a tendency to grow angry with those who do not see the truth; but is it not a foolish thing to be angry with blind men because they do not see?

What if you see yourself? Who opened your eyes? Give God the promise for what you see, and never think that your anger, your indignation, your hot temper, can ever work the righteousness of God. It is contrary thereto, and cannot work towards it.

21. *Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save*

your souls.

Perhaps you have seen a man grafting a tree. What a gash he makes in the tree before he puts in the graft! How he wounds it to make the sap flow into the new wood! If the Lord has made any of your hearts bleed tonight by the sharp cutting of his Spirit, we are not sorry, if it shall the better prepare you for receiving the grafts of his own nature, and his own Word.

22. *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

It is a pity when a man deceives himself; he must be an arch-deceiver.

23–25. *For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, lie is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*

The best thing to do when you look into a glass, and spy a spot on your face, is to wash it off directly. The true use of hearing the Word, or reading it, is to amend one's self at once in those points in which the Word discovers us to be faulty. To look in the glass, and not to wash off the spots, is but a piece of vanity; and to hear a sermon, or read a chapter, and not to put into practice what we are taught, is a sad waste of time.

25. *But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein,*

Perseverance to the end is wanted: "Continueth therein."

He being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

There are many who complain of their short memories when they are hearing

sermons. Well, then, let them be quick about doing what the sermon bids them, and then they will not be forgetful hearers. You have heard how one good woman described the effect of the sermon she has heard. She was one who washed wool, and when her minister went round to ask her what she had learned on the previous Sabbath, she did not even recollect the text. “Oh, Janet!” said he, “I am afraid you are a forgetful hearer; I cannot see what good the sermon has done to you.” So she took him to the back of her house, where she had a pump; and she worked at the handle while she held underneath the spout a sieve full of wool that was dirty and foul. The water ran through the wool, and through the sieve, and all ran away. “There,” she said, “this sieve is like my memory; but, sir, though the water does not stop in the sieve, it washes the wool; and what you preach, though it does not stop in my memory, it has washed my heart and cleansed my life and conversation.” Never mind about keeping the water in the sieve so long as it washes the wool. No man can be said to be a forgetful hearer who is a doer of the work that he is bidden to perform.

26. *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.*

James settles that matter off very peremptorily. An unbridled tongue indicates a godless heart. If religion does not salt your tongue, and keep it sweet, it has done nothing for you. If the doctor wants to know the state of your health, he says, “Let me see your tongue;” and there is no better test of the health of the mind than to see what is on the tongue. When it gets furred up with unkind words, when it turns black with blasphemy, when it is spotted with lasciviousness, there is something very bad inside the heart, you may be quite sure of that.

27. *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

This is not the secret part of religion. Of that we read elsewhere. But this is the very dress that true religion puts on; charitably caring for the most destitute of our fellow-creatures, and holy walking, that we be not as the men of the world are: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

James 2

1-4. *My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*

God will judge us without partiality. Rich friend, that diamond ring will answer no purpose in that day: my ladies, those fine garments will make no impression in that court. My learned friend, that handle to your name will be of no avail; and you, fine sir, with your knighthood, earldom, or dukedom, will be none the better off; for coronets, and even imperial crowns all go for nothing before the throne of God, who is no respecter of persons.

5. *Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?*

You may, therefore, be poor and needy, and yet not only be among the Lord's servants, but be among the very best of them, among the very richest of them, among those whom he loves best of all.

Partiality has been too often shown to rich and great men, but the King of the last and best of monarchy deals out even-handed justice, to the delight of the poor and despised. Here we have the poor mentioned side by side with their King. The sovereignty of God is a delightful theme to the poor in spirit; they

love to see the Lord exalted, and have no quarrel with him for exercising the prerogatives of his crown. It is the fictitious wealth, which labors to conceal real poverty, which makes men cavil at the reigning Lord, but a deep sense of spiritual need prepares the heart loyally to worship the Redeemer King. On the other hand, the King has a special delight in the humbled hearts of his contrite ones, and exercises all his power and wisdom on their behalf, even as Joseph in Egypt ruled for the welfare of his brethren.

Christ hath a kingdom that shall never be moved. He ruleth over all. Doth he call himself a King? he hath made us kings. Is Christ a priest? We are priests unto our God. Dries he sit upon a throne? We shall overcome and sit down with him upon his throne. Will he judge the nations? Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world! Will he be received with triumph by his Father? So shall we when his Father shall say, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

6, 7. *But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?*

Let us learn the wicked folly of those professed Christians who despise the poor. There it growing up, even in our Dissenting Churches, an evil which I greatly deplore—a despising of the poor.

Let empires shake, let crowns fall from heads anointed, let the great ones of the earth put their hands upon their loins like women in travail, let those that were full hire themselves out for bread, and let the rulers be astonished; but as surely as God is God, the day cometh when the Lord will maintain the right and avenge the oppressed, and set; up his great white throne, from which he will “judge the poor,” and “save the children of the needy,” and “break in pieces the oppressor.” So be it, good Lord, and we will bless thy name.

8. *If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:*

The legal spirit is all for expansion; it multiplies it commands, and lays down its ritual for this, and that, and the other; but the gospel spirit is all for condensation. It has condensed the whole law into a single word, that is “love.”

9, 10. *But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*

The gospel is a very humbling thing. It says to the sinner, “Now, sir, you have no merits of your own, and what is more you have no power to obtain merit in the future.” The man claims to have been temperate, chaste, honest, and generous, but the gospel says to him, “You have broken God’s law, and you are condemned for it.” All that you have done was but your duty, and cannot avail to blot out your shortcomings in other respects.

11. *For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.*

God’s law is like a fair vase of alabaster, lovely in its entireness; but if it be chipped in any part, it may not be presented in his court; the least flaw in it mars its perfection and destroys its value. A perfect obedience to a perfect law is that which is required by the justice of the Most High; and is there any one of us who can render it, or who can attempt to pay the penalty due for not rendering it?

12, 13. *So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*

Where God has given a man a new heart and a right spirit, there is great tenderness to all the poor, and especially great love to the poor saints; for, while every saint is an image of Christ, the poor saint is a picture of Christ set in the same frame in which Christ’s picture must ever be set—the frame of humble poverty.

14-16. *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give*

them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

The more faith you have, the more liberality will you display. I do not wonder that some people give so little to the cause of God; they give only as much or, as little as they believe.

17. *Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*

Whatever the statement of James may be, it could never have been his intention to contradict the gospel. It could never be possible that the Holy Spirit would say one thing in one place, and another in another. The fact is, James and Paul are perfectly reconcileable, and they are viewing truth from different standpoints, but whatever James may mean, I am quite confident about what Paul means, and confident about the truth of the two.

What James does mean, however, is this, no doubt, in brief and short, that while faith saves, it is faith of a certain kind. here must be fruits meet for repentance, works of repentance. It is wrong to tell a man he must repent before he may trust Christ, but it is right to tell him that, having trusted Christ, it is not possible for him to remain impenitent.

There never was in this world such a thing as an impenitent believer in Jesus Christ, and there never can be. Faith and repentance are born in a spiritual life together, and they grow up together. The moment a man believes he repents, and while he believes he hath believes and repents, and until he shall have done with faith he will not have done with repenting. If thou hast believed, but hast never repented of thy sins, then beware of thy believing.

18, 19. *Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*

Devils believe all the facts of revelation. I do not believe they have a doubt; they have suffered too much from the hand of God to doubt his existence! They have

felt too much the terror of his wrath to doubt the righteousness of his government. They are stern believers, but they are not saved; and such a faith, if it be in us, will not, cannot, save us, but will remain to all intents and purposes a dead, inoperative faith, it is a faith which produces works which saves us, the works do not save us; but a faith which does not produce works is a faith that will only deceive, and cannot lead us into heaven.

20. *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*

A man cannot really believe that Jesus Christ has taken away his sin by such sufferings as those of the cross, and yet trifle with sin. A man is a liar who says, "I believe that yonder bleeding Savior suffered on account of my sins," and yet holds good fellowship with the very sins that put Christ to death. Oh! sirs, a faith in the bleeding Savior is a faith that craves for vengeance upon every form of sin. The Christian religion makes us believe that we are the sons of God when we trust in Christ. Will a man believe that he is really the Son of God, and then daily and wilfully go and live like a child of the devil?

21-23. *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.*

James says not only that this was Abraham's name, but that he was called by it. The name does not occur in his life as given in the Book of Genesis, and it has been questioned whether it occurs anywhere else in Holy Scripture; for many have preferred to translate the word in Isaiah, and in 2 Chronicles 20:7, as "lover," or "beloved," rather than "friend." However this maybe, it is quite certain that among the Jewish people Abraham was frequently spoken of as "the Friend of God." At this present moment, among the Arabs and other Mahomedans, the name of Abraham is not often mentioned, but they speak of him as Khalil Allah, or the "Friend of God," or more briefly as El Khalil, "the Friend." Those tribes which boast of their descent from him through Ishmael, or through the sons of Keturah, greatly reverence the patriarch, and are wont to

speak of him under the name which the Holy Spirit here ascribes to him. It is a noble title, not to be equalled by all the names of greatness which have been bestowed by princes, even if they should all meet in one. Patents of nobility are mere vanity when laid side by side with this transcendent honor.

24, 25. *Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?*

We are somewhat surprised, I think, to find her name recorded by James, because he is an eminently practical writer, and was writing of good works rather than of faith. His object is to show that the faith which justifies the soul is a faith which produces good works, and hence he looks for instances of holy service of God. We should not have thought that he would have singled out Rahab, but he has done so, and this is the more remarkable because the only other person whom he mentions is Abraham; Abraham the Father of the Faithful, the Friend of God, a perfect and an upright man. James cites Abraham as standing for the one sex, and Rahab the harlot for the other. I have no doubt that James knew what he was about, and that the inspiration which guided him was infallible.

Rahab's faith made her run the risk of being put to death, for if the spies had been discovered there would have been short shrift for Rahab. The king of Jericho's sword would soon have taken off the head of the woman who dared to conceal the enemies of her country. She gladly staked all upon the truth of God, and ran all risks to save the servants of the Lord. In this being far superior to those who will not risk their employment, their situation, their good name, or even the love of a single relative for Jesus Christ's sake.

26. *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.*

The body without the spirit is dead; and what follows upon death with flesh? Why, corruption, corruption so horrible, that even love itself has to cry, "Bury my dead out of my sight." So that if there be in any the body of religion without the life of religion, it leads to decay, and this to corruption; and that has a tendency to putridity of character.

James 3

1. *My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*

Some Christian men seem as if they could not pull unless they are the fore horses of the team. They cannot work with others, but must have the chief place, contrary to the word of the apostle who says, “My brethren, be ye not many masters, lest ye receive the greater condemnation.” Blessed is that servant who is quite content with that position which his master appoints him—glad to unloose the latchet of his Lord’s shoes—glad to wash the saints’ feet—glad to engage in sweeping a crossing for the king’s servants. Let us do anything for Jesus, counting it the highest honor even to be a door-mat inside the church of God, if we might be such a thing as that, for the saints even to remove the filthiness from themselves upon us, so long as we may but be of some use to them, and bring some glory to God.

2. *For in many things we offend all.*

One stands up and has the impudence to say, “I never sin.” Sit down, sir, do not dream that you are among fools; we know better. You may hold your fond conceit if you please, but meanwhile we pray for you; the Lord open your eyes to see the sin in you, for pride is blinding you, its scales are upon your eyes. “In many things we offend all.” “Enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” What man is he that doeth good and sinneth not?

If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

The tongue is such an unruly member that if that be kept—and only through grace can it be so—then we may be quite certain that all the other organs and faculties will be kept, too.

3, 4. *Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.*

If thou wouldst escape the quicksands and the rocks, look well to thy tongue; keep it from evil, that it speak neither blasphemy against God nor slander against thy fellow-men; and keep thy lips from guile, that is, from deceit, from double meanings, from saying one thing and meaning another, or making other people think that you mean another—an art all too well understood in these days. God make us plainspeaking men, who say what we mean, and mean what we say! When, by the grace of God, we are taught to do this, we have learnt a good lesson.

5, 6. *Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*

See the fire! how kindly God hath bestowed upon us that element, to cheer us in the midst of winter's frosts. Fresh from the snow and from the cold we rush to our household fire, and there by our hearth we warm our hands, and glad are we. Fire is a rich picture of the divine influences of the Spirit, a holy emblem of the zeal of the Christian; but alas, sin hath touched this, and the tongue is called "a fire," "it is set on fire of hell," we are total, and it is so evidently full often, when it uttereth blasphemy and slanders, and James lifts up his hand and exclaims, when he looks upon the evils caused by sin, "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth."

7, 8. *For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

The tongue can no man tame, but the grace of God can tame it; and that man begins life with a prospect of happiness whose tongue has been tamed by grace.

9-12. *Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.*

There is only one answer to the question; of course, the fig tree can do nothing of the kind. It would be quite contrary to its nature, and hence the apostle argues that Christians ought, to act according to their nature. If we are indeed the children of God, we should act as his children, and always act as his children. We are not consistent if at one time we speak as heirs of heaven should speak, and at another time speak as the heirs of wrath speak. James truly tells us that a fountain cannot, at the same time pour forth sweet water and bitter, salt water and fresh; and be therefore rightly argues that from the same mouth there must not proceed blessing and cursing, there must be consistency of conduct in those who are the Lord's.

It would be a monstrosity, a thing to be wondered at, and stared at as unnatural and absurd if a fig tree started bearing olive berries and it is just as unnatural for a Christian to live in sin. Can he so live as to bear the fruits of iniquity instead of the fruits of righteousness? God forbid that it should be so! If the fig tree should ever bring forth olive berries, we might have good reason to question whether it was a fig tree, for a tree is known by its fruits; so, when one who professes to be a Christian lives as worldings live, there is grave reason to fear that he is a worldling notwithstanding his profession. If we are to know him by his fruits, which is our Lord's infallible test, how can we imagine that he is a partaker of the divine life when he acts as he does.

13. *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.*

The tongue of a believer ought to be as a fountain which sendeth forth sweet water; in his conversation there should be the meekness of wisdom; and when he cannot speak to profit, his silence may bear witness to his sincerity.

14-16. *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.*

Envy is a curse which blighteth creation; and even Eden's garden itself would have become defaced, and no longer fair, if the wind of envy could have blown on it, envy tarnisheth the gold; envy dimmeth the silver; should envy breathe on the hot sun, it would quench it; should she cast her evil eye on the moon, it would be turned into blood, and the stars would fly astonished at her. Envy is accursed of heaven; yea, it is Satan's first-born—the vilest of vices. Give a man riches, but let him have envy, and there is the worm at the root of the fair tree; give him happiness, and if he envies another's lot, what would have been happiness becomes his misery, because it is not so great as that of some one else. But give me freedom from envy; let me be content with what God has given me, let me say, "Ye may have yours, I will not envy you—I am satisfied with mine," yea, give me such a love to my fellow creatures that I can rejoice in their joy, and the more they have the more glad I am of it. My candle will burn no less brightly because theirs outshines it. I can rejoice in their prosperity. Then am I happy, for all around tends to make me blissful, when I can rejoice in the joys of others, and make their gladness my own.

17. *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

We are to be "first pure, then peaceable." Our peaceableness is never to be a

compact with sin, or an alliance with that which is evil. We must set our faces like flints against everything which is contrary to God and his holiness. That being in our souls a settled matter, we can go on to peaceableness towards men.

18. *And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.*

Even among Churches there be those that are bowed down with infirmities, and these infirmities cause Christian men and Christian women to differ at times. So the peacemaker saith, “This is unseemly, my brother; let us be at peace;” and he remembereth what Paul saith, “I beseech Euodias, and I beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord;” and he thinketh that if these two were thus besought by Paul to be of the same mind, unity must be a blessed thing, and he laboureth for it.

James 4

1. *From whence come wars and fightings among you?*

Whether between nations, or parties or individuals—if there be wars and fightings, whence do they come?

Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

Do they not arise from one desiring something, and another desiring the same thing? Is there not a competition or emulation of an evil kind, in which each one prefers himself, and seeks not the good of his neighbor?

2. *Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not—*

This is nature's way of trying to get by contention what it desires to possess—

fighting, and warring, and killing, yet the result of all this is evil.

After all is done, "yet ye have not." There is a simpler and a surer way which men forget; they leave that divine path untrodden: "Ye have not,"

Because ye ask not.

With all your efforts you do not succeed, because you omit to pray to God.

Prayer would have brought you every blessing that you need; but, instead of going to God, and asking at his hands, you rush upon your neighbor, and seek to

take what you desire as spoil from him.

Perhaps some say, “But we do ask.” “Well, then,” saith the apostle—

3. *Ye ask, and receive not because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

The lusts of the flesh come in, and put us upon the wrong track; or if we take the right road, yet, if the lusts he there, God will not bless us because, in doing so, he would be helping us to gratify our lusts.

4. *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?*

The apostle uses this strong language not concerning the actual sin of adultery as the term is commonly understood, but in relation to our not loving God with true chastity of heart, but lusting after something else.

This is the very essence of spiritual adultery. We ought to give God the whole affection of our being; but, instead of doing so, we allow at least some of it to wander to other objects, and therefore we are called, by the Holy Ghost himself, “adulterers and adulteresses.” These may seem to be hard words, but they are true ones. May they bring us to our spiritual senses, and cause us to love our God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, and strength!

Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

In one sense, Christians are the greatest friends of the world, for they desire the good of all men, and seek their salvation. But, in another sense, viewing the world as a great conglomerate of evil, we are no friends of the world. There is a certain form of theology, popular nowadays, which teaches us that we ought to remove the line of demarcation between the Church and the world. This kind of teaching may be called theology, but it cometh not of God; it is a gross falsehood which we ought to abhor in the very depth of our spirit.

5. *Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth*

in us lusteth to envy.

There is a spirit, resident in the natural man, the human nature of man, which is always inclined toward hate and envy, always wanting to get somewhat from other men, and always grieved if other men seem to be or to have more than the person himself has.

6, 7. *But he giveth more grace.*

How is this spirit to be met? This verse supplies the answer, “He giveth more grace.” “More grace,”—this is the great remedy for hate and envy. “More grace,”—this is the balm for sorrow. “More grace,”—this is our greatest help out of all difficulties. “More grace,”—this is the universal recipe for all that we need: “He giveth more grace.”

Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God.

Lay aside that fighting spirit—that effort to pull others down so as to raise yourself up—and bow before God, yield yourself wholly to his blessed will. This is the way of peace, and the way of joy, too.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

The business of salvation is not all passive, the soul must be aroused to active warfare. I am to fall into the arms of Christ, that he may save me, and trust in him entirely; but when I depend upon him I receive life, and the very first effort of that life is to smite with all its might the adversary of Christ and of my own soul. I am not only to contend with sin, but with the spirit which foments and suggests sin. I am to resist the secret spirit of evil as well as its outward acts.

You shall in the name of Jesus overcome temptation, master evil habit, and escape from bondage: only strike for freedom and disdain the chain of sin. If you are to have peace with God there must be war with Satan; you cannot rest in your spirit and know the peace which faith gives unless you wage war to the knife against every evil and against the patron and prince of evil, even Satan.

8. *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.*

He who believes in Christ sincerely will be much in prayer; yet there are some who say, “We want to be saved,” but they neglect prayer. They cannot make out how it is that they have no enjoyment of religion; but why need they be puzzled? Ask your neglected closet, ask your own heart, how you can be happy and prosperous and blessed in divine things if you do not pray. Recollect that the mere saying of prayers is not praying. The essence of prayer lies in the heart drawing near to God: and it can do that without words. Prayer is the feeling that God is present, and the desire of the soul to come near to him, so as to own his influence, to know his love, to feel his power, and to be conformed to his will. This kind of praying can be continued by the power of God’s Holy Spirit all the day long. We must know something of this. “Behold he prayeth” is one of the first marks of a saved soul and if you think that by some momentary act of faith which you suppose you exercised you are therefore saved, while your heart remains at a distance from God, prayerless and careless, you are fatally deceived.

Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded.

For, if you are double-minded, your hands and your hearts must both need to be cleansed. The apostle does not say, “Concentrate your thoughts,” but he does say, “Cleanse your hearts;” for, to have two objects in life, is a kind of spiritual adultery, from which we need to be purged, so the command is, “Purify your hearts, ye double-minded.”

9. *Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.*

If the previous verses have rightly accused you of sin, confess your guilt with shame and sorrow, and so come to Christ imploring pardon. I grieve to say that I have met with persons who say, “I cannot find peace, I cannot get salvation,” and talk very prettily in that way; but yet outside the door they are giggling one with another, as if it were matter of amusement. The Sabbath day is spent in vain, idle, frivolous conversation—seriousness they do not seem even to have felt.

The whole matter appears to be a mere sport. Some converts seem to jump into religion as people do into a bath, and jump out again about as fast; they never weigh the matter, they have no thought, no sorrow for sin, no humiliation before God.

10. *Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*

If you exalt yourself, he will pull you down. If you lie down in the dust before him, he will lift you up. It is according to God's usual way of acting to practice these reversals. Mary truly sang, "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away."

11. *Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.*

If you cease to think that which is evil, you will also cease to speak evil. If I speak evil of my brother, I have condemned the law which bids me love him as I love myself; I have practically said that it is an absurd law, and an unrighteous law; and this is a great evil in God's sight.

12. *There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?*

You are not called to judge; you are not qualified to judge: "God is the Judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another." There is much better work to be done by us than that of setting up as judges of others. Do not judge the whole character of a man by one single action; do not attempt to judge his motives; you cannot read his heart; you are not omniscient; you are not infallible. You will very soon find other people judging you; and when, one of these days, you shall be falsely judged and condemned, you will not need to have any surprise if you have done the same thing yourself; it will be only your corn measured back to

you with the bushel you used in measuring other people's.

13. *Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain.*

The apostle says, "Go to now!" as if he meant, "you are acting absurdly. See how ridiculous your conduct is." "Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will do such and such a thing." There is almost a touch of sarcasm in the words. The fact of frail, feeble man so proudly ordering his own life and forgetting God seems to the apostle James so preposterous that he scarcely deems it worth while to argue the point, he only says "Go to now!"

14. *Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.*

Whether it will come to us laden with sickness or health, prosperity or adversity, we cannot tell. Tomorrow may mark the end of our life; possibly even the end of the age. Our ignorance of the future is certainly a fact. Only God knows the future. All things are present to him; there is no past and no future to his all-seeing eyes. He dwells in the present tense evermore as the great I AM. He knows what will be on the morrow, and he alone knows. The whole course of the universe lies before him, like an open map. Men do not know what a day may bring forth, but Jehovah knows the end from the beginning.

For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Why, then, is it, that we are always counting upon what we are going to do? How is it that, instead of living in the eternal future, where we might deal with certainties, we continue to live in the more immediate future, where there can be nothing but uncertainties? Why do we choose to build upon clouds, and pile our palaces on vapor, to see them melt away, as aforetime they have often melted, instead of by faith getting where there is no failure, where God is all in all, and his sure promises make the foundations of eternal mansions?

15. *For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this,*

or that.

We are all too apt to say what we will do, and where we will go, forgetting to add, “If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.” All things are under regulation, and have an appointed place in God’s plan; and nothings happens, after all, but what he permits or ordains. Knowing that, we will not always say, “If the Lord will”; yet we will always feel it. Whatever our purposes may be, there is a higher power which we must ever acknowledge; and there is an omnipotent purpose, before which we must bow in lowliest reverence, saying, “If the Lord will.”

16. *But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.*

One man says, about a certain matter, “I will do it, I have made up my mind,” and he thinks, “You cannot turn me. I am a man who, when he has once put his foot down, is not to be shifted from his place.” Then he laughs, and prides himself upon the strength of his will; but his boasting is sheer arrogance. Yet he rejoices in it, and the Word of God is true of such a one: “All such rejoicing is evil.” Another mans says, “I shall do it, the thing is certain;” and when a difficulty is suggested, he answers, “Tut, do not tell me about my proposing and God’s disposing; I will propose, and I will also dispose; I do not see any difficulty. I shall carry it out, I tell you. I shall succeed.” Then he laughs in his foolish pride, and rejoices in his proud folly. All such rejoicings are evil. They are foolish; but, what is worse, they are wicked.

17. *Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*

There are sins of omission as well as sins of commission; may the Lord graciously keep us from both forms of the evil, for his dear Son’s sake!

James 5

1-6. *Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.*

I fear that the goodly Babylonish garment, and the talents of silver, and the wedge of gold, will ruin you as they did Achan of old. These three falsehoods, like the three daughters of the horseleech, will never be satisfied until they have utterly destroyed your soul. You will be wrapt in fine linen and fare sumptuously, and all this shall but ensure you the torments of the damned.

7. *Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.*

Be patient, O worker, for impatience sours the temper, chills the blood, sickens the heart, prostrates the vigor of one’s spirit, and spoils the enterprise of life before it is ripe for history. Wait thou, clothed with patience, like a champion clad in steel. Wait with a sweet grace, as one who guards the faith and sets an example of humility. Wait in a right spirit, anxious, prayerful, earnest submissive to the ways of God, not doubtful of his will. Disciple of Jesus, “learn to labor and to wait.”

Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

While the husbandman waits, you observe in the text he waits with his eye upward, he waits until God shall send him the early and the latter rain. He has wit enough for this; even if he be a worldly man he knows that the harvest depends not only on the seed he sows and on the soil he cultivates, but upon the rain which he cannot control; the rain that cometh at the bidding of the Almighty. If the skies be brass, the clods will be iron. Unless God shall speak to the clouds, and the clouds shall speak to the earth, the earth will not speak to the corn, and the corn will not make us speak the words of rejoicing. Every husbandman is aware of this, and every Christian must remember it.

8. *Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

Let us patiently tarry till the Lord come, for as in the first coming those that waited for him rejoiced, so shall those who are found watching and waiting at his second advent. We have not only the promise of God, but that promise fulfilled to tens of thousands who have preceded us, therefore, we should be ashamed to be impatient, rather let us patiently wait and work on, till the day breaketh, and the harvest cometh.

9-11. *Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure.*

Who counteth them happy? It is a counting which is not general. This arithmetic is only known to faith, and must be learned of the Lord Jesus. Did he not say, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you”? Did he not also say, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted”? This is the verdict of the Savior, and the true disciple must

not dream of disputing with his Master.

Ye have heard of the patience of Job.

Who has not? But you would never have heard of Job if he had always been prosperous. His flocks and his herds, his gold and his silver, his children and their banquets, would none of them have earned immortality for his name; but his poverty and his sickness have done it. He had been simply an Oriental sheikh, honored in his own day, but forgotten like his fellows, had not the malice of Satan and the grace of God forced him into notice. He was knighted on the battle-field.

And have seen the end of the Lord.

Does it not strike you as rather a singular thing that when James wants to show us that the Lord is pitiful, and of tender mercy, he points us to Job on a dunghill, with all his property gone, with his children dead, with his wife ill-advising him, with his friends provoking him, and himself covered with sore brains from head to foot? Who can see the pitifulness and tender mercy of God there? Nobody that is blind; but he who has had his eyes opened by the Spirit of God can see it there, because he does not look so much at the process as at the result; he stays not with the crucible and the furnace, but joyously gazes upon the pure gold which comes from the refining pot.

That the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

The God in whom some believe is unable to feel; they lay it down in their theology as an axiom that God cannot feel. This, however; I take leave to deny. God is able to do all things. I cannot regard him as though he were a block of wood, or a mass of iron, unable to feel. On the contrary, he is represented to us as greatly feeling. You know how a sensitive person is affected at the sight of suffering. Some persons cannot bear to see a creature in pain; they are unmanned thereby, and begin to weep like children. Our God is not only pitiful, but very pitiful; not only of mercy, but of tender mercy. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he was here on earth, was the image of the Father, and we read of him often that “he was moved with compassion.”

There is then, you see, in these two words, pity for misery and mercy for sin: there is inward pity in the heart of God, and outward action in the mercy of God; there is sympathy for suffering, and grace for guilt. These two things make up what we want. That God should pity our griefs and forget out sins, that God should think kindly of us, and act helpfully towards us—these are our greatest needs. What a sea of goodness is in my text: "very pitiful, and of tender mercy!"

12. *But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.*

A man who cannot be believed upon his word certainly cannot be believed upon his oath; and, usually, when a man tells a lie, the next thing he does is to swear to it. When Peter denied his Master, the next thing he did was to curse and to swear, because he thought it likely that they would not imagine that he was a follower of Christ if he did curse and swear; so he gave that as a pretty clear proof that he had not been with Christ, and was not one of his disciples.

13. *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.*

Our troubles should be steeds upon which we ride to God; rough winds which hurry our bark into the haven of all-prayer. Bitterness of spirit may be an index of our need of prayer, and an incentive to that holy exercise.

Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

Psalms are best sung when the heart is glad; therefore seek to shake off your sadness when you come into the house of God; and before you begin to praise the Lord, endeavor to be joyful, cheerful, happy. Did I not say, the other day—Do not leave your bedroom until you feel that everything is right between you and God? I would also add to that—Do not begin to sing until your heart sings. Do try as much as possible to be glad. Does God want slaves to grace his throne? It is the heathen who cut themselves with knives, and think that their god is pleased with their misery; but our God delights in the joy of his people. Be glad before him.

14, 15. *Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.*

How far the gifts of healing may still remain in the Church. I should not like to be forced to say—either to say that they remain, lest any should be led into fanaticism; or to say that they are utterly gone, lest I should be denying some things which, at any rate, look like facts. God does, I doubt not, still hear the believing prayers of his servants concerning the sick; at least, in certain cases, and still should it be, as I judge, an ordinance to be observed, "Is any sick among you? let, him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up."

It is well, no doubt, when we are sick, to seek direction from the physician, but it is a Christian action to resort first to Jehovah-Rophi, the Lord that healeth us. "Is any sick among you?" What saith the apostle? Does he say, "Let him use no medicine," as some "Peculiar People" say? Nay. Does he say, "Use medicine, and nothing else," as the most of professors do? No such thing. "Is any sick among you? Let him call"—that is his duty—"let him call for the elders of the church;" and then, as the form of medicine then in vogue was that of anointing the body with oil, "let them pray over him," and let, them use the ordinary means, "anointing him, with oil in the name of the Lord." Have your medicine by all means, your homoeopathy or your allopathy, or whatever may seem best; but, beside that, make prayer your main confidence, for it is the Lord that healeth us. Jesus is the beloved Physician. If we had more faith in God, and resorted more often to him by prayer and faith, the prescriptions of the medical man might be more often wise, and his medicines more frequently useful. The Lord, who made our house, best knows how to repair the tenement, and he permits us to resort to him. When you are sick, my friend, remember this, and practice it.

16. *Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.*

Confession will lead you to pray one for another, and to join your prayers

together, so that there will be greater strength in the petitions; for if two of you are agreed, you know what power that sweet agreement has with heaven. “They that feared the Lord snake often one to another.”

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

if it be not fervent we cannot expect to find it effectual or prevalent. We must get rid of the icicles that hang about our lips. We must ask the Lord to thaw the ice-caves of our soul and to make our hearts like a furnace of fire heated seven times hotter.

It is a matter of covenant with God that he will hear his children’s prayers. “He shall call upon me, and I will answer him!” Is the Lord faithful? Is he true? Only let us get a reply to those two questions, and the matter is settled. Is he the same God as in former ages? Can he, will he, still keep his word as aforetime? We have but one form of answer to these queries—he is Jehovah, and he changes not.

17, 18. *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are.*

This fact was made very clearly manifest on the occasion to which our text refers. Otherwise he seemed, in most things, to be superior to the ordinary run of men, a sort of iron prophet—what if I call him the prophet of fire?—the man whose whole life seemed to be a flash of flame—a mighty, burning, ecstatic love and zeal towards the cause of God. But Elias had his flaws, even as the sun has its spots. Strong man though he was, he was sometimes obliged to faint, even as the sun sometimes suffers an eclipse.

And he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.

Whenever and wherever there is this abounding prayer, there must be abounding blessing ere long. Baal’s worshippers may pray to him, and he may not answer them; they may cut themselves with stones and cover his altar with their blood, but Jehovah always looks to the earnestness of his people, and will surely avenge

his own elect, though he bear long with them. He will give them the desires of their hearts. May we see—as we have seen it in this church—may we see it renewed among us—may we see it in every part of Christendom, in every church in London, in every church throughout the whole British Empire, and in America, and wherever there are believers—a deep and awful anxiety for souls that will not let believers be quiet, but will give them to exercise an incessant pleading with God which will stir up his strength and cause him to make bare his arm.

Now, if we ask believingly, we are quite sure to ask expectantly. We shall go up to the top of Carmel to look out for the cloud, if we have believingly sought for the rain. We shall send Gehazi yet seven times if he perceive no signal of mercy at the first, and we shall continue in importunate prayer, still believing that Jehovah cannot lie, and will, as surely as he liveth, himself be as good as his word, and fulfill his promise to those who trust him.

19, 20. *Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

The choicest happiness which mortal breast can know is the happiness of benevolence—of doing good to our fellow-creatures. To save a body from death, is that which gives us almost heaven on earth. What holier enterprise can ye engage in than this sacred one of saving souls from death, and hiding a multitude of sins? This is a wealth that ye can take with you—the wealth that has been acquired under God, by having saved souls from death, and covered a multitude of sins.

1 PETER

1 Peter 1

1, 2. *Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ,*

It must have been very pleasant to his heart to write those words—not "Peter, who denied his Master." Not, "Peter, full of imperfections and infirmities—the impetuous and changeable one of the twelve," but, "Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ," as truly sent of God as any of the other Apostles and with as much of the Spirit of his Master resting upon him! "Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ"—

to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

You might go for fifty years to some places of worship and never hear the word, "elect," ever mentioned! Modern ministers seem to be ashamed of the grand old doctrine of election, but it was not so with the Apostles and the early Christians! They were accustomed to speak of one another as the elect of God. The doctrine of election was most precious to their hearts and, therefore, Peter writes, "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father"—

2. *Through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*

We not only need grace, but we need much grace! And also peace. And we need a greatly increased measure of both those blessings. Do not be satisfied, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, with the grace that you already have. Be thankful for it, but ask for the divine multiplication of it—regard the grace which you have already received as being like the boy's loaves and fishes—and expect that Christ will continue to multiply it for you and for thousands of others round

about you! “Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”

3-5. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in Heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

What a vast mass of meaning is packed away in these words! Men’s books, even when they are good, are like gold-leaf—a little precious metal is very thinly hammered out so as to cover a wide surface—but almost every Word in the Bible seems to contain a whole mine of heavenly wealth! Note, Beloved, what Peter says concerning your new birth—you are begotten by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! At your first birth, you were born in sin. But now you have been born-again, through grace, by the almighty power of God! Notice, also, unto what you are born—unto a hope that is full of life, a lively hope, a hope of immortality, a hope whose root is in the grave of Christ, the empty grave from which He has risen and which is the assurance that because He has risen, you also shall rise. See, further, to what you have been born—“to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away.” See, also, how that inheritance is entailed upon you, for it is “reserved in Heaven for you.” And see, too, how you are kept for it, for you “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

6. *Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if necessary, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations.*

What? Can there be rejoicing and heaviness in the same heart at the same time? Oh, yes! Our experience has taught us that we can be at the same moment in heaviness of heart and yet rejoicing in the Lord!

7. *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it is tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

Gilt looks very much like gold but it will not stand the fire. It curls and disappears. Oh, to be solid gold through and through! If so, you need not mind the trials of today, since they will only prepare you for the eternal glories at the appearing of Jesus Christ!

8-9. *Whom having not seen, you love; in whom though now you see Him not, yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*

You have that already if you have believed in Jesus! You have received a present, immediate salvation! There are some who do not understand or realize this. They miss the whole joy of our holy religion. They are always hoping to be saved, by-and-by, but those who are in Christ Jesus by a living personal faith, receive here and now the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls!

10-12. *Of which salvation the Prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what or what manner of the time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from Heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*

They did not taste of the grace you know, but through the vista of the future they foresaw it and they almost envied you in this gospel dispensation that you should live in so clear a light and should be fed upon such rare mercies. Oh, what Prophets and kings longed for, do not let us despise! And we shall despise these mercies if we do not make the most of them by entering into the fullness of the joy which they are meant to bring to us. These Prophets searched diligently.

Observe that the Prophets did not speak without due consideration, but they “enquired and searched diligently” into the meaning of that salvation of which they “testified beforehand.” Holy Scripture must not be read by us carelessly. We

ought to peer, pry and search into it to get at its hidden meaning. And the prophecies as well as the rest of the Word are to be searched into by us upon whom the ends of the earth have come.

Observe, also, that this divine Revelation is of great interest to the holy angels before the Throne of God—they stand gazing down as if they were trying to understand the wondrous mystery of Redemption and the great and glorious gospel of the grace of God.

13. *Therefore gird up the loins of your mind.*

Do not let your garments flow carelessly and loosely, as though you had no journey before you, but, "gird up the loins of your mind."

Be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

That is a very blessed subject. There is a grace that was brought to you when Christ first came. There is another grace and a higher grace that is to be brought to you when Christ shall come the second time! Until that Second Coming of Christ, the Church on earth and in Heaven cannot be perfected. The bodies of the saints wait in the grave till He comes to give them resurrection.

14-16. *As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which has called you is holy, so be you holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, be you holy; for I am holy.*

Be not only moral, upright, truthful and so forth, but, "be you holy." That is a very high attainment! "Be you holy" and observe the reason for obedience to the command—"for I Am holy." Children should be like their fathers. There are many children who bear in their very faces, evidence of their sonship. You know who their fathers were by the image that the children bear. Oh, that it were always so with all the children of God! "Be you holy; for I Am holy."

17. *And if you call on the Father, who without respect of person judges according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*

You are only here for a while. You are sojourners, foreigners, pilgrims passing through a country where you have no abiding place. Be, therefore, careful and even fearful lest you should become like the people among whom you dwell! Have a holy dread of the contaminations of sin—"Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Not in unbelieving fear, but in that holy carefulness which watches against sin of every kind lest in any way you should spoil your holy work for God.

18, 19. *Forasmuch as you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*

As your redemption cost so much, prize it highly and do not go back to the sin from which you have been so dearly redeemed! Fear lest you should do so. Remember that heredity has a great power over you—the traditions of your fathers will imperceptibly draw you back unless you watch against them. But you have been so gloriously redeemed with the very blood of Christ's heart that you must not draw back.

20, 21. *Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.*

What a well of joy this always was to Peter, that God had raised His Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead! And this is our joy today! This is one of the facts which are proved beyond all question, that Jesus Christ, who died upon the Cross and was buried in Joseph's tomb, did actually rise again! This is the cornerstone of the Christian faith— one of the great facts upon which we found our confidence as to salvation by Jesus Christ. Whenever you think of the glory of your risen

Lord, remember what your redemption cost Him and quit all dead works—lay aside the grave clothes of care and anxiety and live in newness of life as those who have been redeemed by the risen Savior.

22, 23. *Seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart,*

See how this love of the brethren is linked on to regeneration. The first time we are born, we are born in sin, and that tends to hate. But when we are born-again, born unto God, our life tends to love.

being born-again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible,

Peter reminds us, in the 18th verse, that we were not redeemed with corruptible things, but with incorruptible. And he here reminds us that we are "born-again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible." Everything about a Christian means his deliverance from corruption and the bringing of him into a state of immortality and incorruption.

by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever.

God's Word never dies! God's Word never changes! There are some who think we ought to get a new gospel every few years or even every few weeks—but that was not Peter's notion. He wrote and he was divinely Inspired to write concerning "the Word of God, which lives and abides forever."

24, 25. *For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away: but the Word of the Lord endures forever. And this is the Word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*

Everything earthly is corruptible. That which is merely natural has its season of decay, but the children of God have the Word of the Lord abiding in them—and that never dies—it has no autumn or winter.

1 Peter 2

Peter is very practical in his Epistles. In the early days of the faith, Christians occupied a far more difficult and dangerous position than they do today. They were few in number and greatly despised. All manner of crimes were falsely alleged against them—they were accused of things too vile for me to mention. The Apostle, in writing to these Christians, begs them to so behave that they should commend the gospel of Christ.

1. *Therefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking.*

Have we not constantly declared that our faith, if true, is always practical? Here, again, we have the precepts of God's Word. Here we are told that there is much for us to lay aside, as if it were natural to us in every case, and must, therefore, be carefully laid aside. "Malice"— we are all inclined to return evil for evil—the Christian must not do so. "All guile"—everything like craft and cunning—this is unbecoming in a Christian. "Hypocrisy"—seeming to be what we are not—all sorts of mere seeming we must lay aside. "And envy"—how easy it is for us to envy one man his wealth, or another his health, or another his talents—but "all envy" the Christian must have done with! "And evil speaking"—it is painful to reflect how much of evil speaking there is among persons who we still hope are good people. They are very fond of repeating stories to the disadvantage of their fellow Christians. Now, whether you are the author of it or not, do not be the retailer of it, for we are here told to lay aside all evil speaking. But then the religion of Jesus Christ does not consist in negatives!

2. *As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby.*

It is not merely what we are to lay aside—there is something to be taken up. We are told that as we are born-again, we are to consider ourselves as newborn babes, and are to desire the unadulterated milk of God's Word, that we may grow thereby. It is not enough to be alive—we should desire to grow. To be saved is a great blessing—we ought not, however, to be contented with being barely saved —we should seek after the graces of the Spirit and the excellent work of God within us. You are in the family of God, but you are only babes in it. You have to grow to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus, so "desire the sincere (unadulterated) milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby." There is no other way of growing.

3. *If so you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*

Have you tasted this? Oh, search yourselves and see, and if you have, then prove it by the laying aside of the evil, and the thirsting after the good!

4. *Coming to Him, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious.*

When men disallow Christ, it is a matter of small account to us. As for what they have to say, it is less than nothing and vanity. Like the wild bluster of the winds, let it bluster until it has blown itself out. Christ is "disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious"—

5. *You also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*

See what Jesus Christ has made of you who believe in Him! By the incorruptible blood and the incorruptible seed, He has brought you into a heavenly priesthood and you are, today, to stand at the spiritual altar and "to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

The priesthood among believers does not belong to here and there, one, but to the whole company of believers. As many as love the Savior are priests and kings unto God—and they should regard their whole life as the exercise of this

priesthood. When we assert that no place is holy above another, we do not thereby desecrate any place, but rather consecrate all places. We believe every day to be holy, every hour to be holy, every place and occupation to be holy to holy men, and we should so live as to evermore exercise this consecrated priesthood.

6-8. *Therefore it is also contained in thee Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believes on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you, therefore, who believe, He is precious.*

Is He not? Then enjoy His preciousness, all of you who truly believe in Him! Precious Christ, precious to all His people, precious to me!

But unto them which are disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the Word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

When Peter wrote these verses, he must have thought of his own name. He was called a stone or a rock—and once he was to his Master "a rock of offense" when he stumbled at Christ's Word, and began even to rebuke his Lord! But he was forgiven and saved, so now he gives a warning to others lest they should still more grievously sin by making Christ, Himself, to be to them "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense."

9. *But you are a chosen generation,*

Hear this, you believers! Drink in this precious truth of God! See God's election, making you to be a people born of the Holy Spirit—"a chosen generation"—

a royal priesthood,

This is a wonderful combination! Kings and priests at the same time! All honors

meet on you through divine grace.

an holy nation, a peculiar people,

You have national privileges. God reckons you not as a mob or a herd of men, but as a nation, and a nation with this peculiar hallmark upon you, that you are "a holy nation." This is the true token of your nationality that you are "holiness unto the Lord." "A peculiar people" belonging to God alone, marked off from the rest of mankind as peculiarly His! You are not and you are not to be as other men are—you are "a peculiar people." Your road is not the broad one where the many go—it is the narrow one which the few find. Your happiness is not worldly pleasure, but pleasures at the right hand of God which are forevermore. You are "a peculiar people"—

that you should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

You are to be advertisers of the praises or virtues of Christ, not only to know them and to be glad to know them, but to make them known to others. Beloved, how far are you doing this? I put the question personally to each one of you, for you were chosen by God on purpose that you "should show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"—

10. *Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God,*

In time long past, who ever heard of the Britons, or of the Anglo-Saxons? We were not a people, but we "are now the people of God"—

which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

We may well leap for joy, we who once had not obtained mercy! We sinned against the Lord, but He was long-suffering, and now we have obtained mercy. How good it is to look back to the hole of the pit whence we were dug! What if today the Sovereign grace of God has made us royal priests, yet let us remember

that in past times we were not a people, “But are now the people of God.” “Which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” Yes, I think no exercise will be more profitable by way of expressing our gratitude than the remembering what we used to be before the hand of God was laid upon us in love! For if all of us did not run to an excess of riot in our outward lives, yet some of us did. and others who were kept from gross outward sins had, nevertheless, a very sink of corruption within our nature.

11. *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.*

For you belong not to the corruptible world, you are of an incorruptible race—“I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims”—

12. *Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers.*

Which they are sure to do. The better you are, the more will they censure you. This is the only homage that evil can pay to good, to fall foul of it and misrepresent it—“that whereas they speak against you as evildoers”.

13, 14. *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.*

Christians should be good citizens. Though in one respect they are not citizens of this world, yet as they find themselves in it, they should seek the good of those among whom they dwell and be patterns of order.

15-17. *For so is the will of God, that with well-doing you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*

Even if they are beggars, they are men—honor them. There is God's image, though marred and defiled, in every man—and because he is a man, honor him —pity him. Look down upon him never with contempt, but always feel that there is an immortal spark, even within that mass of filth. If the man is cast into all manner of beggary and wickedness, "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the King." The same verse that says, "Honor the King," however, says, "Honor all men," and while we, therefore, have due respect to rank, yet a man is a man for all that, and we must "Honor all men."

18, 19. *Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endures grief, suffering wrongfully.*

I have known some that could not do that, however. If they were only spoken to very gently, they were immediately in a tiff. A sense of injustice stings a man. He does not like to lose his rights, or to be buffeted when he has done no ill. But the Spirit of Christ teaches us to "endure grief, suffering wrongfully"—to bear still, and still to bear. We are to be like the anvil—let others strike us if they will, but we shall wear out the hammers if we only know how to stand still and bear all that is put upon us.

For what glory is it, if when you are buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? But if when you do well, and suffer for it, you take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

Here is something more than human nature can bear. Now grace comes in to help. "This is acceptable with God."

21-23. *For even hereunto were you called.*

Called, you see, to be buffeted when you don't deserve it.

Because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in

His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

There was no reason why He should be made to suffer, for He had done no wrong. He was buffeted for no fault of His own, yet how patiently He endured it all! He did not even open His mouth to murmur or complain, but He handed the whole matter over to the Supreme Court of Appeal—"to Him that judges righteously." It will be wise for us, also, to feel that we can afford to wait, knowing that our Avenger lives and that, in His own good time, He will rectify all wrongs and justify His people against all their accusers. It is sweet, for the dear love of Jesus, to put up with a thousand things which, otherwise, we should resent. "But," says one, "if you tread on a worm, it will turn." Perhaps it will, but a Christian is not a worm—he is a being of a nobler order than that and he does not go for his example to reptiles—he looks up to Christ and follows His steps.

24-25. *Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness. By whose stripes you were healed, for you were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.*

Therefore, since you have been brought back by the rich grace of God, continue to bear and forbear, that you may be the means of bringing others back. That is Peter's counsel to servants, or slaves, as most of them were.

1 Peter 3

1, 2. *Likewise, you wives be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the Word, they also may, without the Word, be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.*

Could any men be won to Christ without the Word of God? Yes, it was even so in the Apostle's day. When they refused to attend the little Christian meetings that were being held, and so could not hear what was said, yet, at home, they saw the change that the gospel of Christ had worked in their wives and they said, "She is quite different from what she used to be. Certainly, she is a far better wife than any heathen woman is—there must be something in the religion which can make such a change as that." In this way, without the Word, many of them were won to Christ by the godly conversation of their wives.

3, 4. *Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*

There is no ornament like that! No taste can ever conceive anything so lovely as a holy character. No expensive materials, and no ingenious fashioning of them, can ever produce such true beauty as "a meek and quiet spirit." You must have known some godly matrons, venerable Christian women, whose gentle piety has blessed the whole household of which they formed a part. They attained supreme authority over all by simply yielding—they gained a queenly position in the house by gentleness and quietness. Nobody dared to offend them—not because they would have been in a passion, but because they were so inoffensive, so

kind, so gentle.

5-7. *For after this manner in the old time the holy women, also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters you are, as long as you do well, and are not afraid with any amazement. Likewise, you husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*

It has been one of the most beautiful results of the spread of the Christian religion that it has uplifted womanhood so that now—instead of women being, as they were, and still are where the gospel is not received—the slaves of their husbands, Christianity has taught that honor should be given to the wife. If there are any husbands who do not so, they err from the gospel way.

8. *Finally, be you all of one mind,*

Be unanimous. Do not hold Church meetings to talk about nothing, and so quarrel for the lack of something to do. Be united with the resolve that you will glorify God and that there shall be no dissension, no division among you. “Be you all of one mind.”

having compassion one of another.

Have true fellow-feeling towards each other.

Love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.

The Christian should be the highest type of gentleman, in every respect the most gentle man, kind, self-forgetful, seeking the comfort and well-being of others to the utmost of his power.

9. *Not rendering evil for evil,*

That is beast-like—it is certainly not the rule for a Christian. Good for evil is Godlike. And you who are the children of God should seek to act as He does —"not rendering evil for evil."

or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that you are thereunto called, that you should inherit a blessing.

Every man should give away according to what he has. He who gives curses probably gives them because he has so much cursing in him. You can always tell what a man is like by noticing what comes from him. If he curses, it is because curses abound in him. But you are to give blessing to others because you have inherited so much blessing from Christ—your whole tone, temper, spirit, language, action should be the means of blessing to others!

10. *For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.*

Not only no lies, but no guile, no deceit, no shuffling. Say to a man's face all that you say behind his back. You will soon be in trouble if you have two tales to tell —one in his presence and the other in his absence—but if you are free from "policy"—from "knowing how to play your cards," as the world says, then shall it be seen that you have one of the attributes of a true Christian. If you refrain your lips, that they speak no guile, people will know where to find you and they will want to find you, for such men are always in demand.

11, 12. *Let him turn away from evil, and seek to do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

He "sets His face against them," as we say that we set our face against certain company which we do not approve. But "the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous"—that is, those who seek to do good to others, for Christ's sake, are

under the special protection of God—and they have the high privilege of being permitted to pray with the certainty that "His ears are open unto their prayers."

13-15. *And who is he that will harm you, if you are followers of that which is good? But and if you suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are you: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*

Have your doctrinal views and all your knowledge of Christ packed away in a handy form, so that when people want to know what you believe, you can tell them! If they wish to know why you believe that you are saved, have your answer all ready in a few plain, simple sentences—and in the gentlest and most modest spirit make your confession of faith to the praise and glory of God. Who knows but what such good seed will bring forth an abundant harvest?

16, 17. *Having a good conscience that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God is so, that you suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.*

Who can doubt the truth of that clear declaration?

18-21. *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient.*

It is as when a man is taken before a magistrate. He is known to be guilty and therefore he is remanded and put in prison till his trial shall come. Such is the state of souls apart from the body—they are spirits in prison—waiting for the time of their trial. There is not, in the sense in which the Romanist teaches it, any purgatory! Yet there is a place of waiting for lost spirits which is in Scripture

called, “Hell,” because it is one room in that awful prison, in which must dwell forever spirits that die finally impenitent and without faith in Christ.

When once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh.

The ark was immersed in those dreadful rains and awful waterfalls which deluged the earth, and Noah’s family were buried in that ark to all the world. But by this burial they were floated out of the old condemned world into the new world of life and divine grace. Death to the world and burial in the ark were the means of their safety. Baptism is a most significant picture of regeneration, but it is in no sense the cause of the new birth. Baptism saves no one, except, as Peter says, in figure. But as a figure, it is eminently full of divine teaching, for it sets forth the great truth of God that the believer, standing today in the old world, is buried to that world, “buried with Jesus Christ by baptism into death.” And his rising from the liquid tomb is the figure of his resurrection in Christ, into a new world, as a new man, “that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

But the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That is to say, those persons who have been baptized are persons who have the answer of a good conscience towards God through Christ’s resurrection—through faith in Christ’s resurrection they now have the consciousness of the forgiveness of sins; and so faith in the resurrection of Christ, is represented as an essential and indeed the chief element of Christian baptism.

22. *Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God,*

To sit at the right hand of God is the highest conceivable glory. The mother of Zebedee’s children asked that her sons might sit, the one on His right hand, and the other on His left, in His Kingdom, but Jesus said it was not His to give. The Father has given the Son to sit in the highest place nearest to His Throne, yes, on

the very Throne of God, for we read of “the Throne of God and of the Lamb.” Jesus, our Brother, is elevated to the throne of the Most High. Infinite leagues must necessarily lie between the Creator and the created, but between God and man, in Christ Jesus, there seems no distance at all—the Man Christ Jesus sits at God’s right hand.

angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

The Man Christ Jesus is Lord of all the shining ones. When you count up the available forces of your Lord, do not forget these invisible armies. The air will soon teem with invisible spirits if they are needed for our defense, for our Savior is their Lord. The day shall come when all the hosts of Heaven shall come down to earth, attending the Son of Man—then shall they gather out of His Kingdom all things that offend and, at the same time, they shall delight to display their loyalty to Him that once did hang upon the Cross.

He has power over all devils as well. They are fallen angels and Jesus has subdued them once and for all. They cannot tempt His followers without His permission. They cannot put forth their finger to bring any calamity upon a Job unless God wills it. These dogs are muzzled and, therefore, we should not fear them

Whatever else this term “angels and authorities and powers” may comprehend, Christ has under His sway. That is to say, all kings and princes upon earth, all leaders of thought—political or religious—all controllers of human movements are subject to Him. Do not be afraid of this or that form of anarchy—nothing can shake the eternal Throne of the Prince of Peace.

1 Peter 4

1. *Forasmuch then as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for He that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.*

Brethren, we have a Savior who suffered for us. As the Head was, such must the members expect to be. Let us, then, be resolutely determined that, suffer as we may, we will never turn aside from our Lord, for, inasmuch as we suffered in Him, yes, and died in Him, we ought to reckon that we are henceforth dead to sin and that we have ceased from it, and can no longer be drawn into it. “He that has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.”

2. *That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.*

The doctrine of Substitution is the strongest possible argument for holiness. You lived in sin once, but Christ died for your sin, so you must reckon that, in Him, you died to sin, seeing that He died in your place. And the argument is that, henceforth, your life is to be a life in Him, a life of holiness, to the praise and glory of God.

3. *For the time past of our life may suffice us to have worked the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excesses of wine, revellings, banquets and abominable idolatries.*

Suffice? O, let it do much more than that! Let it make us cry, “Would God that we had never worked the will of the Gentiles at all!” Some young people foolishly say that they must have a little space in which they can “see life.” Ah,

those of you who have been converted in later years regret that you ever saw what men call, “life,” which is but the alias for corruption and death! “For the time past of our life may suffice us to have worked the will of the Gentiles.”

4. *Wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you.*

What a strange world this world is! It speaks evil of men because they will not do evil! Yet it has always been so. The men, “of whom the world was not worthy,” have been the very people of whom worldlings have said, “Away with such fellows from the earth! It is not fit that they should live.” The world’s verdict concerning Christians is of little value.

5. *Who shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.*

There will be a day when those who are alive at the coming of Christ will be judged. And those who were dead long before that time will not escape the judgment—for they shall be raised from their graves to appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.

6. *For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.*

This is a very difficult passage to expound, but I suppose the meaning is that the gospel was preached to those departed saints who had been called to die for Christ’s sake and that it was preached to them for this very reason, that while they were judged by wicked men, and were by them condemned to die, they still live a far more glorious life than they lived here, because they were thus enabled, by their martyr death, to consummate their consecration to God.

7. *But the end of all things is at hand.*

We are never told the exact date of the times or seasons which are yet to come. It

is the evident aim of the Holy Spirit to keep us on our tiptoes of expectation. We are always to be as men whose Lord may come at any minute of the day or night. “The end of all things is at hand.”

Be you therefore sober and watch unto prayer.

Do not get intoxicated with anything, neither with pride, nor with covetousness, nor with the cares of this world. Maintain your equilibrium. Stand steadfast and firm. “Be you, therefore, sober”

8. *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

It covers them sometimes by not seeing them, for, where there is much love, we are blind to many faults which, otherwise we might see. We do not exercise the sharpness of criticism which malice would be sure to exercise. Besides that, when love applies herself to prayer, and when, in addition to prayer, she kindly gives admonition to a beloved friend, it often happens that true Christian love does really prevent a multitude of sins. The Apostle does not mean that by loving another person I shall cover my own sin; nor does he mean that the exercise of charity, in the common acceptation of that word, can cover my sin! But if I have much love to others, I may be the instrument, in the hand of God, for covering many of their sins in one or other of the senses I have mentioned.

9. *Use hospitality, one to another, without grudging.*

Whenever saints of God traveled in those days, there were few public inns available for their accommodation, so they stayed with brethren in Christ as they went on their way.

10. *As every man has received a gift, even so minister the same, one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

Whatever “the gift” is, whether it be money, or talent, or divine grace, “even so minister the same, one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of

God.” God gives much to you that you may give it to others—it is only meant to run through you as through a pipe. You are a steward and if a steward should receive his lord’s goods, and keep them for himself, he would be an unfaithful steward. Child of God, see to it that you faithfully discharge your responsibility as one of the “good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”

11. *If any man speaks,*

Let him speak thoroughly well, but, in order that he may do so, what shall be his model?

let him speak as the oracles of God.

As truthfully, carefully, solemnly, as the Bible, itself, speaks.

If any man ministers, let him do it as of the ability which God gives.

“If any man ministers,” or serves—if he is called to serve the Church in any capacity—“let him do it as of the ability which God gives.”

That God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever Amen.

Note how Peter has the same spirit in him as that which burned in the breast of Paul, for he stops in the middle of a letter, lays down his pen, and lifts up his heart to God in an adoring strain of thanksgiving—“to whom be praise and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

12. *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.*

In Peter’s day the Christians were called, not only to what might be metaphorically termed, “the fiery trial,” but they had literally to suffer thus for Christ’s sake. Nero had multitudes of Christians brought to his gardens and tied

to stakes, that he might light up his midnight revelries by the burning of these godly men and women smeared with pitch. They had to bear even that fiery trial for the name of Christ. Many periods of martyrdom have passed, since then, in which the saints of God have willingly died rather than deny their Lord. We have fallen upon comparatively silken times—a jest, a slander, a calumnious observation—these are the only weapons with which our enemies can smite the most of us.

13. *But rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad, also, with exceeding joy.*

If you do not share in Christ's humiliation, how can you expect to share in His exaltation? But if worldlings begin to rebuke and reproach you, take it for granted that they can discern something of Christ in you. Dogs do not usually bark at those who live in the same village with them—it is only at strangers that they bark. And when ribald tongues are lifted up against you, you have reason to hope that you are a stranger and a foreigner to the citizens of this world, for they love their own, as our Savior reminded His disciples, "If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

14. *If you are reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you,*

Did not your Savior say, "Blessed are you when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for, behold, your reward is great in Heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the Prophets." So, be glad about it.

for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified.

Whenever they speak against you that which is not true, they think that they shall slander the name of God by slandering you, but they do no such thing. As far as they are concerned, God is evilly spoken of, but that is all you could have

expected from such people. “But on your part”—and that is the thing you have to look to—“on your part He is glorified.”

15. *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters.*

A curious mixture that—is it not? A murderer is classed with “a busybody in other men’s matters.” But, really, people of this latter sort are very obnoxious. There are some who seem as if they cannot mind their own business. I have heard that it is for two reasons. First, because they have not any business to mind and, secondly, they have no mind at all with which to mind their business! But these very people think they can mind other people’s business and the more is the pity. See how strongly Peter condemns them and asks that none of those to whom he writes may have to suffer because of such wrongdoing.

16, 17. *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.*

Trial and testing must begin there. We must not expect to have our religion taken for granted and ourselves to be saved simply upon our own warranty. We must be tried—“The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed.” “The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God.”

And if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

If the wheat is winnowed, what is to become of the chaff? If God puts even the gold into the fire, what is to become of the dross? If that which is really valuable has to be tested, what is to be done with the mire and the clay? Oh, that all who have no part or lot with Christ would consider this solemn truth of God!

18. *And if the righteous scarcely are saved,*

—If they are saved with difficulty—

where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

If even men who live godly lives are often hard put to it to know whether they shall be saved or not—if they raise the question again and again with a terrible seriousness, “where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”

19. *Therefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in doing well, as unto a faithful Creator.*

The whole run of the chapter is that we are to prefer any suffering of the flesh to the sin of the spirit and we are to be prepared to endure whatever trial or pain may come upon us for Christ’s sake, and to hear it joyfully, rather than to seek the pleasures of sin and to be plunged under the waves of the wrath of God. May He give us the grace thus to glorify Him, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

1 Peter 5

1. *The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder*

Peter was not always thus gentle, but the Spirit of God had rested upon him and now he writes with much tenderness. He does not say, "As an Apostle, I command," but, "As an elder, I exhort."

and a witness of the sufferings of Christ.

Peter was what we have not been, an eyewitness of the suffering of Christ. He actually and in very deed saw our divine Master in His terrible griefs. Peter could never forget that he saw the Lord Jesus in His agony in the Garden. Peter was in the palace of Annas, warming himself by the fire, so he was an eyewitness of all that transpired. Peter and others of the Apostles saw Him after He had been scourged. They marked Him after He had been despised, flouted and mocked. They watched Him as He went in awful anguish along the Via Dolorosa to the Mount of Crucifixion. And they stood and saw Him nailed to the tree, to die there, like a felon, with no relief or succor, for God Himself forsook Him. And the bitterest pain of all was that He had to cry," My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

There is one other view of this witness-bearing, and that is that Peter was, to a very large extent, a partaking witness in the sufferings of Christ. He does not say so in our text, but in the 13th verse of the fourth Chapter he wrote, "Rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings." And he could write like that because of what he had, himself, endured for Christ's sake. He had been mocked, despised, persecuted. His life had been sought and he knew that he would have to suffer a painful death, for His Master had said to him, "When you shall be old, you shall stretch forth your hands, and another shall gird you, and carry you where you would not." Putting all these things together, Peter could

truly say that he was a witness of Christ's sufferings because he had, in a measure, participated in them.

and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.

Very strangely, Peter here writes of himself as "a partaker of the glory." Did he mean that he was on the holy Mount of Transfiguration and saw the splendor of that sight when Christ was all aglow with a white light which gathered up all brightness and beauty into its solitary ray? Was he thinking of that memorable scene? I know not. It may have flitted across his mind but, in this passage, he says that he is "a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." Not the glory that had been revealed, but that shall be revealed.

2, 3. *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.*

I think, when he was writing to these elders, he seemed to say to them, "Feed the flock of God, for I saw the Great Shepherd when He bought that flock. I was there when He purchased the sheep with His own blood. And, after He had risen from the dead, three times He said to me, 'Simon, son of Jonas, Do you love Me?' And when I answered, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You," He said to me, 'Feed My lambs. Shepherd My sheep. Feed My sheep.' Therefore, O my Brethren, by His agony and bloody sweat, by His Cross and passion, by His precious death and burial, by His glorious resurrection and ascension, I beseech you, 'feed the flock of God which He has purchased with Jesus' own blood.'" I see great force in this exhortation by the eyewitness who is writing to his fellow elders.

4. *And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*

In the Atonement Jesus is alone—there is no one with the good Shepherd. In the Resurrection for our justification He is alone—no one aids the Great Shepherd. But at the Second Advent He will be with His people, Chief among many. Read

the verse—“And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away.” So you see Christ is the Chief Shepherd at the Second Advent. Then shall the world be astonished to find that though alone in Atonement and alone in Justification, He is not alone in service or in Glory. Then every minister who has fed His sheep, every teacher who has fed His lambs—all of you, holy men and women who have in any way whatever contributed under Him towards the guidance and the government and the feeding and the protection of His dear, blood-bought flock—you shall appear!

5. *Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility.*

I am, as a member of a Church, not to seek honor for myself, but I am to walk humbly. I am not to make it in any respect the objective of my Christian life to be esteemed among my fellow Christians so as to have influence over them and to take the lead among them.

For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Humility is the grace that attracts more grace. As money makes money, so humility increases humility and, with it, every other spiritual gift. If you would have much grace, have much humility. God has assistance for the humble, but resistance for the proud. Wherever God sees pride lifting itself on high, He resolves to level it in the dust. He draws His bow, He fits His arrow to the string—and pride is the target that He shoots at. The more pride enters into the Christian’s heart, the less grace will enter there—and the more opposition from God will come—for pride is never so hateful to God as when He sees it in His own people.

6. *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.*

Remember, you cannot do any good unless “the mighty hand of God” is with you! Therefore be humble and look to His hand for all success. Feel it to be a wonderful thing that the mighty hand of God should ever use you and, therefore, lie very low in that hand, and beneath that hand, for then you may claim the

promise that He will exalt you in due time. If you are willing to be nothing, God will make something of you! The way to the top of the ladder is to begin at the lowest rung. In fact, in the Church of God, the way up is to go down—and he that is ambitious to be at the top will find himself, before long, at the bottom.

7. *Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you.*

The care which you are to cast upon God is wearing you out and you are to cast it upon God because, in quite another sense, “He cares for you.” The word used in reference to God is applied to caring for the poor and in another place to the watchfulness of a shepherd. Our anxiety and God’s care are two very different things. His care, though tender and comprehensive, causes no anxiety to Him, for His great mind is more than equal to the task.

“Casting,” says the Apostle. He does not say “laying all your care upon Him,” but he uses a much more energetic word. You have to cast the load upon the Lord—the act will require effort. It is no child’s play to cast all our care upon our Lord when there are six little children, shoes worn out, cupboard empty, purse bare and the deacons talking of reducing the scanty salary! Here is a work worthy of faith—you will have to lift with all your soul before the burden can be shifted and the anxiety cast upon the Lord! That effort, however, will not be half as exhausting as the effort of carrying your load yourself.

8. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about,*

Perhaps Peter here alluded to the roaring of persecution. How Satan roared with persecutions in Peter's days. He roared and roared and roared again till none but stout hearts dared to show themselves valiant for Christ. But there is another kind of furious attack—the roaring of strong and vehement temptation. Have you known what it is to have this temptation come again and again and again, till you were in agony? You felt that you had rather die than thus be perpetually assaulted for you feared that in an evil hour you might leave your God and turn unto perdition.

seeking whom he may devour.

Nothing short of the total destruction of a believer will ever satisfy our adversary. Nothing less than the perfection and complete salvation of a Christian is the heart's desire of our Savior. He will never see the full fruition of the travail of His soul till all His people are completely saved. The reverse is true of Satan. He can never be content till he sees the believer utterly devoured. He would rend him in pieces and break his bones and utterly destroy him if he could.

9. *Whom resist,*

Yield an inch and you are undone, but become more watchful and more vigilant over yourself in that particular sin and resistance must certainly bring victory. Be more prayerful every time he is more active. He will soon give it up if he finds that his attacks drive you to Christ. Often has Satan been nothing but a big black dog to drive Christ's sheep nearer to the Master.

stedfast in the faith,

Seek to obtain a clear knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel and then get a good grip of them. Be ready to die sooner than give up a particle of God's revealed truth. This will make you strong. Then take hold of the promises of God which are yes and amen in Christ Jesus. Be ready for every attack of Satan's commencing with, "Is it written?"—answer Satan with "Thus says the Lord"—"Steadfast in the faith."

knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

As they came through the temptation safe and unharmed, so shall you. As they testified that their light afflictions worked out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory—so that shall be your testimony. As they have overcome and now circle the Throne of God clothed in pure white garments—so will you. And inasmuch as their temptations have left no tears upon their brow, no stains upon their robes, no rent in their royal mantles—so neither shall Satan be able to disfigure or to mutilate you—you shall come out of every trial and of every struggle, losing nothing therein save that which it is well to lose—your dross and your tin, your chaff and your bran.

10, 11. *But the God of all grace,*

Peter turns from exhortation to prayer. Having exhorted believers to walk stedfastly, he bends his knee and commends them to the guardian care of heaven, imploring upon them one of the largest blessings for which the most affectionate heart ever made supplication. “The God of all grace;” of quickening grace, of convincing grace, of pardoning grace, of believing grace, the God of comforting, supporting, sustaining grace. Surely, when we come to him we cannot come for too much. If he be the God, not of one grace, or of two graces, but of all graces, if in him there is stored up an infinite, boundless, limitless supply, how can we ask too much, even though we ask that we may be perfect?

who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus,

“Glory!” Does not the very word astound you? “Glory!” Surely that belongs to God alone! Yet the Scripture says, “glory,” and glory it must mean, for it never exaggerates. Think of glory for us who have deserved eternal shame! Glory for us poor creatures who are often ashamed of ourselves! Yes, I look at my book, again, and it actually says, “glory”—nothing less than glory! Therefore it must be so. We lived in Christ, we died in Him, we were buried in Him and rose in Him—and we shall ascend into Heaven to reign with Him! All our glory is by Christ Jesus and in all the glory of Christ Jesus we have a share.

after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.

He asks for them four sparkling jewels set in a black foil. The four jewels are these:—Perfection, Establishment, Strengthening, Settling. The jet-black setting is this—“After that ye have suffered awhile.” We must not discard the sufferings. We must take them from the same hand from which we receive the mercy; and the blessing bears date, “after that ye have suffered a while.”

11. *To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

This should be the single desire of the Christian. I take it that he should not have twenty wishes, but only one. He may desire to see his family well brought up,

but only that, “To God may be glory forever.” He may wish for prosperity in his business, but only so far as it may help him to promote this—“To Him be glory forever.” He may desire to attain more gifts and more graces, but it should only be that, “To Him may be glory forever.”

2 PETER

2 Peter 1

1. *Simon Peter, a servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.*

Peter here uses both his names—Simon or Simeon, which was his first name and signifies, “hearing with acceptance.” And happy are they who have the hearing ear and the receptive heart. And then there is what I may call his Christian name, the name which Christ gave him, Petros, or Cephas, a rock or stone. Those who learn to hear well, since faith comes by hearing, may hope to obtain even greater stability of character than Peter had. Observe that Peter calls himself, “a servant of Christ.” There is no higher honor than to be a servant of God. “To serve God is to reign.” An ancient philosopher was the author of that maxim and Christianity fully endorses it. He is a true king who is a servant of God. In this respect, all believers are on a level with Peter, but here is his distinguishing title, “an Apostle of Jesus Christ,” a sent one, one who had seen the Lord and who could bear personal testimony to the fact of His existence, His death and His Resurrection. Hence the Apostleship has ceased, since there are no longer any who lived in our Lord’s days upon the earth.

To them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

These Epistles are not written to everybody. Some readers do not seem to remember this fact. This one is written, says the Apostle, “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us.” The faith of the weakest believer in Jesus is the same kind of faith as that which was found in Simon Peter—who stands among the very first of the worthies in the College of Apostles. “Like precious faith with us.” Only think of it, you whose faith is of a very trembling sort, which might be well described as, “little faith.” Yet yours is “like precious faith” with that of Peter and the rest of the Apostles. The tiniest diamond is as truly a diamond as the Koh-I-Noor, and the smallest faith, if it is really the work of the Spirit of God, is “like precious faith” with that of the Apostles.

2. *Grace and peace be multiplied unto you,*

You have some measure of these choice blessings—may you have a great many times as much! When we go to the multiplication table, we not only multiply by two and by three, but we can multiply by a hundred—we can multiply by ten thousand. Oh, that God would thus multiply to us the grace and the peace that He has already given us! “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you—

through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

The more we know of God, the more grounds and reasons shall we have for enjoying grace and peace. And the more we know of God and of Jesus, our Lord, the more will our enjoyment of grace and peace be multiplied.

3. *According as His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that has called us to glory and virtue.*

It is through knowing God that we realize that “His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness,” for all these things are in Him —and as we know Him, trust Him, love Him and become like He—we also come to possess all these precious things in Him.

4. *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises:*

that by these you might be partakers of the divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

See what is God's great objective in giving us these "exceeding great and precious promises." It is that we may become morally and spiritually like Himself—just and true and holy and righteous, even as God Himself is. O brethren, we fall far short of the high example that we find set before us in our gracious God! Nevertheless, we press forward towards the goal, strengthened by God Himself, who, having begun to make us like Himself, will never cease that blessed work until He has fully accomplished it.

3-7. *According as His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that has called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this*

"Since it is God who, by His divine energy, has made you partakers of the divine Nature, see that you use your grace-given energy—rest not idly upon your oars because the tide of grace carries your ship onward."

giving all diligence,

It is not man's effort that saves him, but on the other hand, grace saves no man to make him like a log of wood or a block of stone. Grace makes man active! God has been diligently at work with you—now you must diligently work together with Him.

add to your faith virtue.

As you have seen the mason take up first one stone and then another, and then gradually build the house, so are you Christians to take first one virtue and then another, and then another, and to pile up these stones of grace one upon the other until you have built a palace for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit!

Faith, of course, comes first, because faith is the foundation of all the graces, and there can be no true grace where there is no true faith. Then “add to your faith virtue,” which should have been translated, “courage.” True courage is a very great blessing, indeed, to the Christian—without it how will he be able to face his foes? “And to courage knowledge,” for courage without knowledge would be foolish rashness, which would lead you to the cannon’s mouth when there was nothing to be gained by flinging away your life.

and to knowledge temperance,

There are some who no sooner get knowledge than they are carried away with the new doctrine which they have learned and become like intoxicated men, for it is possible to be intoxicated even with the truth of God! Happy is that Christian who has temperance with his knowledge who, while holding one doctrine, does not push that to the extreme, but learns to hold other doctrines in due conformity with it. “And to temperance patience,” or endurance, so that we are able to endure the “trial of cruel mocking” or sharp pains, or fierce persecutions, or the usual afflictions of this life. He is a poor Christian who has no power of endurance. A true Christian must “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”

and to endurance godliness,

Having a constant respect to God in all our ways, living to God and living like God as far as the finite can be like the Infinite. “And to godliness brotherly kindness.” O dear Friends, let us be very kind to those who are our brethren in Christ Jesus! Let the ties of Christian kinship unite us in true brotherhood to each other.

and to brotherly kindness charity.

Let us have love to all men, though especially to the household of faith.

8. *For if these things are in you, and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord*

Jesus Christ.

I am sure you do not wish to be barren. I cannot imagine that any of you will be content to be unfruitful, so seek after all these virtues and may God help you to give diligence to the attainment of them.

9. *But he that lacks these things is blind, and cannot see afar off,*

He is short-sighted. He has some light, and some physical sight, but he cannot see at a distance. Spiritually, he is blind.

and has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

It is a great mercy not merely to see men as trees walking, but to have clear spiritual vision. There is a great deal of dust that gets into our eyes—and there is no way of clearing out that dust and becoming long-sighted, getting a sight that can see to Heaven—except by getting that spiritual life which manifests itself in faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love.

10. *Therefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if you do these things, you shall never fall.*

This is the second time that Peter writes about giving diligence. We are told not to be slothful in business and this matter of which Peter write is the most important of all business! To prosper in this world may bring some advantages, but to prosper in heavenly things is infinitely better! “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure”— that you may be sure of it and that others may be sure of it, too. Let it not continue a subject of question with you, “Am I the Lord’s, or am I not? Am I called by grace, am I chosen by God, or am I not?” Make these things sure beyond all doubt! He who is diligent in seeking these graces is kept from falling. Every Christian is safe from a final fall, but he is not safe from a foul fall unless he is kept by grace.

11. *For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into*

the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

You shall get far into the Kingdom—you shall know the innermost joys of it. You shall get near the King and you shall became like the King—and when you come to die, you shall not be tugged into the harbor like a dismasted, water-logged vessel, but you shall go in like a full-rigged ship with all sails set. And so you shall have an abundant entrance into the fair haven of Eternal Happiness. May God grant us this unspeakable blessedness, so that we shall not "be saved, yet so as by fire" but that we shall find our Heaven begun below—and go from Heaven below to Heaven above scarcely knowing any change at all! There have been saints who have found the stream of Christ's love running so strongly and carrying them down to the great ocean of Eternal Life, that they have scarcely known where the river and the ocean have met!

12. *Therefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you know them, and are established in the present truth.*

We are not merely to preach new truths of God which people do not know, but we are also to preach the old truths with which they are familiar. The doctrines in which they are well established are still to be proclaimed to them. Every wise preacher brings forth from the treasury of truth things both new and old—new, that the hearers may learn more than they knew before—old, that they may know and practice better that which they do already know in part.

13. 14. *Yes, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance,*

When people are as they should be, it is worthwhile to stir them up. You do not want to stir up dirty water, but you may stir that which is pure and sweet as much as you like. And a good fire sometimes becomes a better one by a little stirring up.

knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has showed me.

In the last chapter of the gospel according to John, it is recorded how Christ prophesied concerning the death of Peter, that when he was old, he would stretch forth his hands and another should gird him, and carry him where he would not. The Evangelist adds, “This spoke He, signifying by what death he [Peter] should glorify God.” The prospect of crucifixion was thus always before Peter’s mind—and knowing what was to happen to him—he was not alarmed, but was rather quickened to greater diligence in stirring up the saints to make their calling and election sure. Hear behind you, O Christian, the chariot wheels of your Lord! Hear behind you the whizzing of the arrow of Death and let this quicken your pace! Work while it is called today, for the sun even now touches the horizon and the night comes when no man can work. If we knew how short a time we have to live, how much more earnest, how much more diligent would we be! Let us be up and doing! “Let us not sleep, as do others, but let us watch and be sober,” working diligently until the Lord comes, or calls us Home to Himself.

15. *Moreover I will endeavor that you may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance.*

When we are gone from the earth, we want the truth of God that we have spoken to live on after us. We want, even from our graves, to continue to speak for Christ. Therefore it was that Peter kept on repeating the same truth over and over again. He hit this nail on the head many times and sought to clinch it—so that when he was gone, it would not move from its place, but would remain firmly fixed.

16. *For we have not followed cunningly devised fables*

He had no retractions to make as he came towards the close of his ministry. He did not have to say that, after all, he had been greatly mistaken—there had been an advance in theology since Jesus Christ had died and he was sorry to say that he had preached a good deal when he was young which he would like to unsay now that he was old. Oh, no! Peter held fast to what he had previously preached because he knew that it was the very truth of God!

There is need in these perilous times to come back to such an elementary truth as this. The truths taught us in God’s Word are not fables, myths, or merely parables, but they are matters of actual fact. The Apostles were eyewitnesses of

“the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”— “eyewitnesses of His majesty.” We receive these truths of God without the slightest question and base our faith upon them. We would be troubled, indeed, if we had any doubts whatever about these great foundation facts of our holy religion.

when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

Peter and James and John were with Christ on the Mount of Transfiguration and Peter here bears his witness that they were not deceived when they bowed down before Christ and worshipped Him as Lord, nor were they deluded in expecting His coming and believing in His power.

17, 18. *For He received from God the Father honor and Glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent Glory, This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from Heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the Holy Mount.*

Peter was not deceived about that matter! At the time, he and his fellow Apostles had been overcome by the too-transporting sight, but they all knew that it was no vision, or dream, or delusion, so Peter here speaks very positively concerning it. Why can we not receive the testimony of true witnesses such as Peter and the other Apostles who sealed with their life’s blood the witness which they bore to their Lord and His truth?

19. *We have also a more sure word of prophecy,*

Surely nothing could be more sure than the evidence presented to the Apostles in the holy mount! Yet Peter thus writes to express his utmost confidence in the Word of God. Surer than the light he saw, which dazzled him. Surer than the voice he heard which he never failed to remember and to which he always bore unfaltering witness! Surer, even, than these things is that divine Book which is still preserved to us—“We have also a more sure word of prophecy.”

whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines

in a dark place, until the day dawns, and the day star arises in your hearts.

You already have the assurance of the Word, itself—you must build upon that and upon that, alone—but you shall have added to that a, "day dawns," and a, "day star," in your own hearts. We have the witness within us now—"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." And those things which we have received by faith we now have proven to be true by their effect upon our own souls! We know the Light of God, now, because we walk in it! We know it to be the Light of God for it has enlightened us.

20. *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.*

Even the Prophets themselves did not always know the full meaning of their own prophecies. Many prophecies have never been completely understood until they have been fulfilled. This passage also appears to me to mean that no prophecy is to be restricted to any one event, so as to say, "This prophecy has been entirely fulfilled."

21. *For the prophecy came not in old times by the will of man,*

So that they sometimes spoke what they did not themselves understand. The prophecy carried its own key within itself and the key could not be found until the prophecy was fulfilled. I believe that the prophesies in the Revelation and in the books of Daniel and Ezekiel are very much of this character, and that while it is quite right to watch for and expect the coming of the Lord, we shall spend our time more profitably in preaching the doctrines of the gospel than in meditating upon the mysterious prophecies of the Word. They will be understood when they are fulfilled, but we do not think they will be fully understood before that time.

but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

This is the foundation of our faith—that this Book is divinely Inspired! Allow nobody to make you doubt concerning this matter, for you must give up

Christianity, itself, if you give up the Inspiration of this Book! You have nothing else to fall back upon but this Book—and your own personal verification of it by the work of the Holy Spirit in your own soul! To tamper with Inspiration is to tamper with the heart of true religion! The least doubt upon that matter is fatal.

It is a disbelief of Inspiration which lies at the bottom of all the modern theories —but with this disbelief we have not the slightest fellowship. In our inmost souls we believe that “holy men of God spoke as they were moved (or, “borne along”), by the Holy Spirit.” They spoke not for their own age, alone, neither were the prophecies given to a few persons so as to belong privately to them—but the whole Inspired Scripture stands fast for all the faithful and is the truth of God to us, today, even as it was to those to whom it was first spoken!

2 Peter 2

1, 2. *Even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies,*

How true that still is! Be not startled, brethren, as though some strange thing had happened to us in this generation! It was always so and so it will continue. If there are true Prophets, there will also be false prophets. And if there is the Spirit of God, there will be the spirit of evil! And often, in proportion as the everlasting truth of God is full of power, the everlasting lie will be full of power, too, and will strive mightily against it. That same sun and shower which shall make yonder wheat to grow, will, at the same time, cause the thorns to spring up! And perhaps for a time they may threaten to choke the wheat until, at last, the wheat will choke the thistles. "There were false prophets also among the people."

They always try to do their hateful work privately and then they ask, "What is all this fuss about? We have not departed from the truth, we are as sound in the faith as any of you are," when they know, traitors that they are, that they are undermining the foundations and trying to take away the very cornerstone of the faith! These "false teachers" would deceive the very elect of God if it were possible, but they are not easily deceived, for God has given them a discerning mind by which they "try the spirits whether they are of God." The Lord Jesus said of His sheep, "A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." Sheep though they are, they have discernment enough to know their shepherd—and the godly soon detect false teachers who privily "bring in damnable heresies,"

even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be spoken of evilly.

They say, “It is narrow; it is old-fashioned; it is not in accordance with the spirit of the age.” I know not what else they say, but, for all that they say, it still remains “the way of truth.”

3, 4. *And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingers not, and their damnation slumbers not. For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to Hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgement.*

“If God spared not the angels that sinned,” He will not spare any who sin, however high their position may be—even though they are the angels of the Churches, He will “cast them down to Hell.”

5. *And spared not the old world, but saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.*

Which some in these days say could not be consistent with the acts of a God of love. Their imaginary deity, from whom they have taken away every glorious attribute of holiness and justice, would not have done this! But the God that judges righteously must and will punish sin, as He always has done and, “this God is our God forever and ever,” even the God who is “a consuming fire.”

6-8. *And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly; and delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds).*

I love to see in God’s people a holy horror of the sin which surrounds them. In several of the prayers in which we joined before we came upstairs to this service, there were many tears and cries over the wickedness of our streets—the impurity

and the drunkenness which defile so many all around us. Alas! Alas! Men seem bent on horrible iniquity and it looks as if London, this great modern Babylon, will repeat the story of the cities of the plain! Well may we pray, "O Lord, have mercy upon the people!"

9. *The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations,*

If the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation, then, depend upon it, there is a way of deliverance out of every temptation. The Lord does not know what does not exist. If He knows that there is a way of deliverance, then there is a way of deliverance, and there is a way of escape for you. You do not see it—do not ask or wish to see it. Ah, those eyes of ours—would God that they were put out! I was going to say we see a great deal too much, brethren, or we think we do. And because we say we see, we go blindly on, stumbling and blundering every foot of the way! It is for God to see and it is for us to believe and to trust in Him! There is a way of deliverance and it will be proved before long that there is a way of deliverance for you. If you believe it, you shall see it. God knows how to deliver—that means that there is a way of deliverance.

and to reserve the unjust unto the Day of Judgment to be punished.

Observe that Peter does not say, "the ungodly." He is not dealing with their inward character so much as with their outward conduct. They are "unjust." Ungodliness is unrighteousness and, sooner or later, the ungodly are seen to be unjust. You hear their blasphemies. You mark their infamies and your indignation burns against them—but the Lord knows how to deal with them. He knows how to reserve them under restraints. He acts like a magistrate who commits a prisoner for trial at the Great Assize.

10. *But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise government. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.*

We have far too many, nowadays, of both these sorts of sinners, and of the two sorts joined in one—"them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government."

11-18. *Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you; having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.*

Hear the Word of the Lord by the mouth of His servant Peter! Tremble at it and be afraid.

19. *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.*

Solomon himself, with all his wisdom, played the fool and though he was the most sagacious ruler of his age, he became, for a while, completely subject to his fleshly desires. Man is born to be a servant and a servant he must be!

20. *For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them*

than the beginning.

Supposing a man, then, to have been washed in the blood of Jesus, to be quickened of the Spirit of God—supposing him to have gone back and to have entirely and totally lost all divine grace. He would be the hopeless man, beyond the reach of mercy, damned while yet living, a living Hell even in the midst of this world! O Beloved, how necessary, then, is it that the Christian should persevere and hold on even to the end!

21, 22. *For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*

I cannot conceive of anything more ignominious than for a soldier to be drummed out of a regiment of Her Majesty's soldiers, but what must it be to be cast out of the host of God! What must it be to be set up as the target of eternal shame and everlasting contempt for having crucified the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame! How shameful will it be to be branded as an apostate from truth and holiness, from Christ and his ways. Better never to have made a profession than to have belied it so wretchedly, and to have it said of us, "it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."

2 Peter 3

1. *This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.*

The purest minds need stirring up at times. It would be a great pity to stir up impure minds. That would only be to do mischief. But pure minds may be stirred as much as you please and the more the better! There are hallowed memories in the minds of all Christians, but those memories are apt to lie asleep—it is well to ring the alarm bell and wake up all the memories within the believer's heart, even as Peter did when he wrote—"I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance."

2. *That you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy Prophets, and of the commandment of us, the Apostles of the Lord and Savior.*

Peter believed in the inspiration of the very "words" of Scripture. He was not one of those precious "advanced thinkers" who would, if they could, tear the very soul out of the Book and leave us nothing at all. He wrote, "That you may be mindful of the words"—the very words—"which were spoken before by the holy Prophets." "Oh," says one, "but words do not mean anything—it is the inward sense that is really important." Exactly so—that is just what the fool said about eggshells. He said that they did not matter—it was only the inward life-germ of the chick within that was important! So he broke all the shells and, thereby, destroyed the life that was within! We contend for every word of the Bible and believe in the verbal and plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture, believing, indeed, that there can be no other inspiration but that. If the words could be taken from us, the sense, itself, would be gone.

3. *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers,*

A prophecy which has been abundantly fulfilled! You need not go far to find them—they come in the form of living men—and they swarm in the form of their books. They are to be met with almost everywhere! Like the locusts, they fill the air and hide the light of the sun! “There shall come in the last days scoffers.”

walking after their own lusts,

Errors of doctrine are almost always attended with errors of practice and, certainly, they legitimately lead that way. Those who scoff according to the lusts of their intellect are very likely to live according to the lusts of their flesh! The two things are congruous. They are born from the same cause, they flourish for the same reasons, and they tend to the same ends! “Walking after their own lusts.”

4. *And saying, Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.*

Only the modern scoffers have tried to improve upon their predecessors, for they say, “All things have developed by evolution from the beginning, which never had a beginning, but which somehow or other has always existed.” Thus the scoffers change their tune, but they never alter their spirit—it is always an attack upon the revealed truth of God! Indeed, they scarcely seem to believe that there is any revealed truth, and they will only accept that which they might, themselves, have invented! Notwithstanding what these men say, all things have not continued as they were since the beginning of the creation, for there have been great interpositions of divine power in the past, as Peter goes on to show.

5-7. *For this they willingly are ignorant of that by the Word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same*

Word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Admire the power of God's Word! It was by the Word of God that the heavens were made, by the Word of God that the earth was drowned, by the Word of God that it has been preserved ever since—and will be preserved until, by that same Word, fire shall come to devour all the works of men. As surely as Noah's flood came, so surely shall there be a burning up at the appointed season. "The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same Word are kept in store, reserved unto fire."

8. *But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

You are in a hurry. You do not understand the infinite leisure of the Eternal One. The wondrous system of divine grace seems to have hardly room and scope enough in the few years that men give to it by their prophetic calculations! But God's prophecies are being fulfilled to the very letter. It may be that the length of time for their accomplishment will be far greater than any have imagined, yet to God it shall still be a very little while. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." We cry, "How long? How long?" Yet, according to God's reckoning, it is but the day before yesterday that Christ died, and only about a week ago that Adam was expelled from Eden. A thousand years is, after all, a very brief space of time. If it is measured by our life, it seems long. But what is the life of a man? Measured other ways—and there are many other modes of measurement—it grows even longer. But measured by the eternity of God, it is a vanishing point altogether—there seems to be nothing left of it.

9. *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

So He hurries not. He gives the sinner space and time enough in which to repent. Oh, that man would turn to God, moved by that gracious long-suffering of His!

10. *But the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,*

It is impossible to tell when it will come, but the Day of the Lord will come and, to the great mass of mankind it will come as a thief in the night. Though often warned, they will not expect it. The Lord's saints will watch for Him, for they are not in ignorance that that Day should overtake them as a thief. But, to the ungodly, the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."

in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth, also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Men make great boasts concerning what they build and there are many wonderful works of men upon the face of the globe. But the day will come when there will be no trace of them left, for they will have utterly disappeared! Why, then, should you and I live for these things—for the things which are seen, which are temporal? O Beloved, live for the things which are not seen, which are eternal!

11. *Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness.*

These are garments which we should wear in prospect of eternity! These are things which no fire can touch, for holiness and godliness will outlive even the flames of the Last Great Day!

12, 13. *Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the Day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness.*

We believe that God will, in the end, have a complete victory over sin, and that even this poor world of ours, purified by the fire, shall be lifted up, in a sevenfold splendor, to be a part of the great Kingdom of our God. "New

heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness."

14. *Therefore, Beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless.*

Be diligent to get rid of all those spots which sin has made. In one sense, you are cleansed from them, already, but in another sense, the purifying work must constantly go on. You are to overcome your besetting sin—you are to vanquish all your tendencies to evil—every thought is to be brought into captivity to the mind of the Lord.

15, 16. *And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul, also, according to the wisdom given unto him, has written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable, twist, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

If Peter, here, alluded to the Doctrine of Election, and the great doctrines that spring out of predestination, that is no argument why they should not be preached, for if they are not to be preached because men twist them, then nothing is to be preached, seeing that we are here told that they also twist other Scriptures unto their own destruction! Any rope will do for a man to hang himself with—and any doctrine will surface for a man to ruin himself with if he wishes to do so. The doctrine of divine Mercy has been twisted into a reason why we should live in sin! The doctrine of Human Capability has been twisted into this falsehood—"I can repent when I like, or believe when I like and, therefore, I may leave it to the very last." There is no form of opinion which cannot be rendered mischievous! Our business is to study the Word of God and preach it as we find it—and if men will twist it, we cannot help that. Is it not so that the truth of God will always be a savor of life unto life to those who believe —and a savor of death unto death to those who perish?

17, 18. *You therefore, Beloved, seeing you know these things before,*

beware lest you, also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace

The only way to prevent falling is to grow— the tree that grows will not fall over!

and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

An ascription of praise to Christ is never out of place at the beginning or at the end of an Epistle, or in the middle of it! You may praise the Lord Jesus Christ anywhere, at any time—it shall never be a waste of time to sing unto His name! "To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen."

1 JOHN

1 John 1

1. *That which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life.*

You remember how John begins his Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word “and how, a little later, he says, “In him was life.” The Holy Spirit seems to have recalled those expressions to his mind, for he moves him to use them again. Note how clearly, how explicitly, John writes concerning the Logos, the eternal Word. He says, “That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life,… that declare we unto you.” The facts of Christ’s history on earth are recorded by eye-witnesses who could not be deceived concerning them. They exercised their various senses with regard to Christ—hearing, seeing, and touching him again and again.

They were veracious witnesses, and they died in testimony of their faith in what they asserted. And when anything has been heard, seen, inspected, and even touched and handled, by a company of reliable witnesses, the testimony of such witnesses concerning it must be accepted as true.

2. *(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.)*

John and his fellow-apostles were eye witnesses of the coming to earth of God in human flesh—the indwelling of the Word of life in a body like our own. That same eternal Being who is Very God of Very God, and is worthy to be called essentially Life, was made flesh and dwelt among us, and the Apostles could say

—“We beheld his glory.”

3. *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.*

See how he hammers this nail as if he will drive it fast! How he rings this bell that it may toll the death-knell of every doubt!

That ye also may have fellowship with us.

But John, what is the value of fellowship with you, you and your brethren, a parcel of poor fishermen, who wants fellowship with you-hooted, despised, mocked and persecuted in every city—who wants fellowship with you?

And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

What a leap from the fisherman to the Father’s throne, from the poor, despised son of Zebedee up to the King of Kings! Oh, John, we would have fellowship with thee now! We will have fellowship with thy scorn and spitting, that we may have fellowship with thee, and with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ.

The Father delights in his risen Son, no more to suffer and to die, having accomplished all his work; and I am sure that we have fellowship with the Father in that rejoicing. Then think what is the joy of Christ, who has passed through the shades of death, and risen from all the gloom of the sepulcher no more to die. I trust, dear brethren and sisters in Christ, that we have fellowship with him, for we also have risen with him unto newness of life.

4. *And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.*

“There,” the apostle seems to say, “if you have doubts, they will kill your joy. Doubt is a great joy-killer; but we have seen him, we have heard him, we have handled him who is the fountain of all true joy. Let no doubts come into your hearts, for these are well-attested facts of which we speak.

“We live still,” saith John—though, perhaps, when he wrote, he may have been

the last survivor of the eleven,—"we live still, by our testimony concerning Christ, to confirm your faith, that your joy may be full."

Hear ye this, ye people of God! The object of the revelation of Jesus Christ is that you may have joy—yea, that you may have a heart full of joy, and that you may know what full joy means; for, here below, we get but drops and dashes of joy, unless we are brought into fellowship with God through Jesus Christ; and, then, we have the very joy of God in our souls. Oh, the delight of it! Oh, that you could all know it to the full!

5. *This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

Not a light, nor the light, though he is both, but that he is light. Scripture uses the term light for knowledge, for purity, for prosperity, for happiness, and for truth. God is light, and then in his usual style, John, who not only tells you a truth but always guards it, adds—"in whom is no darkness at all."

6. *If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*

Mark here, this does not mean walking in the darkness of sorrow, for there are many of God's people that walk in the darkness of doubts and fears, and yet they have fellowship with God; nay, they sometimes have fellowship with Christ all the better for the darkness of the path along which they walk, but the darkness here meant is the darkness of sin, the darkness of untruthfulness. If I walk in a lie, or walk in sin, and then profess to have fellowship with God, I have lied, and do not the truth. He who walks in ignorance and sin, is in fellowship with the powers of darkness; but he is certainly not in fellowship with God, who is light.

7. *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

So that, in the very highest state to which we can attain in this world, namely, walking in the light, as God is in the light, and having fellowship with him, even

then we shall sin, and shall still need the blood of Christ to cleanse us from its stain. So those err exceedingly who say that the Christian man can or does live utterly free from sin. Either they have lowered the standard by which they judge the actions of men, or they excuse themselves on some Antinomian principle, or else they must be altogether ignorant of the truth about the matter; for "if we walk in the light, as God is in the light," and have fellowship with him, still "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin;" and, therefore, there is sin needing to be cleansed, for Christ does no work as a superfluity. But what a mercy it is for us to feel the continual cleansing of the precious blood of Jesus, so that, if we sin through ignorance, or if we sin by omission or by commission, that precious blood constantly keeps us so pure, that we can still walk with God!

8. *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

We are walking in darkness when we thus talk of light. It is easy for a blind man to talk of light though he cannot see it; and there are some who boast of very superior light who, nevertheless, are so much in the dark that they cannot even see their own sin.

It does not matter either, in what sense we say it. We may try to beguile ourselves with the idea that we say it in some peculiar gospel sense; but "we deceive ourselves" if we say it in any sense whatsoever, for we have sin, and we do sin.

9. *If we confess our sins.*

That is the point; and he, who says that he has no sins, will not confess them. He, who believes himself to be perfect, cannot enjoy the blessing described in this 9th verse. To deny that we have any sin, is to walk in darkness, and to show we are without the light which would reveal our sin to us, kind if we are walking in darkness we cannot be in fellowship with God. But to see sin in ourselves from day to day, humbly to confess it, and mourn over it, is to walk in the light; and walking in the light, we shall have fellowship with God who is light.

He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all

unrighteousness.

Oh, those words, and more especially that glorious word “all!” This must include the vilest sin that ever stained human nature, the blackest grime that ever came from the black heart of man. And now John is very careful when he strikes a blow to hit completely. He has already smitten those who say they have no sin, and now he smites those who say they did not at one time have any.

10. *If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

The idea of having no sin is a delusion; you are altogether deceived if you say so; the truth is not in you, and you have not seen things in the true light; you must have shut your eyes to the high requirements of the law, you must be a stranger to your own heart, you must be blind to your own conduct every day, and you must have forgotten to search your thoughts and to weigh your motives, or you would have detected the presence of sin. He who cannot find water in the sea is not more foolish than the man who cannot perceive sin in his members.

Our only safe course—and may the Spirit of God grant us grace to follow it—is to come to God as we actually are, and ask him to deal with us, in Christ Jesus, according to our actual condition. If we are to walk with God at all it must be in the light, and if we once walk in the light with him our condition will tally with the description of verse seven; we shall see sin in ourselves and daily feel the blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us therefrom.

1 John 2

1. *My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not.*

That you may abstain from it, and abhor it, and not indulge in anything that would lead you towards it. He is anxious that they should not sin, he knows they do, and that if they say they do not, they lie. Still the Christian's object is sinless perfection, and though he will never have it till he gets to heaven, that is all the better because he will always then be pressing forward, and never reckoning that he has attained.

And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

We are to seek to live—a perfectly holy life, but inasmuch as we constantly fall short of that ideal, here is our comfort; we still have an Advocate, we still have One who undertakes our cause, and pleads for us before his Father's throne.

2. *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

By which is merit, not only that Jesus Christ died for Gentiles as well as Jews, and for some of all nations, but that there is that in the atonement of Christ which might be sufficient for every creature under heaven if God had so chosen every creature, the limitation lying, not in the value of the atonement itself, but in the design and intention of the Eternal God. God sent his Son to lay down his life for his sheep. We know that Christ redeemed us from among men, so that the redemption is particularly and specially for the elect; yet at the same time the price offered was so precious the blood was so infinite in value, that if every man that ever lived had to be redeemed Christ could have done it. It is this that

make us bold to preach the Gospel to every creature, singe we know there is no limit in the value of the atonement, though still we know that the design of it is for the chosen people of God alone.

Come ye, then, to Christ for pardon, whether ye are Jews or Gentiles, whether ye are saints or sinners, whether ye are old or young, whether ye are moral or immoral, for God is both able and willing to forgive all manner of sin because of the propitiation offered by his well-beloved Son, "Jesus Christ the righteous."

3. *And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.*

Holiness of life is the best proof that we know God. It matters not how readily we can speak about God, nor how much we suppose that we love him, the great test is, do we keep his commandments? What a heart-searching test this is! How it should humble us before the mercy-seat!

Obedience is the test of discipleship. Mere head knowledge is all in vain, and all in vain our fears, unless we render a practical obedience to the commandments of Christ. We shall not only savingly know him, but we shall "know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."

4. *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him.*

This is a terrible condition for anyone to be in, to say that he knows Christ, and yet to have the Holy Spirit calling him a liar because he is not keeping Christ's commandments. Again I remind you that obedience is essential to Christian discipleship. If we refuse to obey Christ's commandments it is clear that we do not really know the Saviour at all, we are not even beginners in the school of Christ.

5. *But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.*

Note the gradation: we know him, we are in him we know that we are in him.

When every word of his is precious to us and when we strive to live according to his precepts, then we know that “we are in him.” This is even more than knowing that we know him, for it is the assurance that we are united to him by a living connection which can never be broken.

6. *He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.*

Abiding in Christ helps us to live as Christ lived; not, as one well observes, that we can walk on the water as Christ walked upon it, but that we can walk in our daily life even as he did, because we abide in him.

7. *Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.*

“From the time when Christ first began to preach, or when the gospel was first preached in your ears.” The old commandment is the word which we have heard from the beginning, yet it is always fresh and new.

8. *Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth.*

That which is new in the gospel, in one sense, is not new in another; for, though John was about to write what he called a new commandment, yet, at the same time, he was writing something which was not novel, something which was not grafted upon the gospel, but which grows naturally out of it, namely, the law of love.

9. *He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness, even until now.*

God is love, and God is light therefore, love is light, and the light of God is love.

Where enmity and hatred are “till in the heart, it is proof positive that the grace of God is not there.

10. *He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.*

Love is the great and sure way of abiding in the light, abiding in Christ.

11–14. *But he that hateth his brother is in darkness and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.*

Having overcome him, at the first by your faith in Christ you still go on to conquer him by abiding in Christ.

15. *Love not the world neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

For this sinful world is directly opposed to the Father. You cannot send your heart at the same time in two opposite ways—towards evil and towards good; you must make a choice between the two.

16, 17. *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the*

will of God abideth for ever.

Everything else is transient, fleeting, and soon passeth away; but he that doeth the will of God has entered into the eternal regions, and he has himself become one of those who abide for ever. It ought not, then, to be difficult to make a choice between these fleeting shadows and the everlasting substance. Do not be carried away, therefore, from your old firm foundation, and from your eternal union to Christ.

18. *Little children, it is the last time.*

You may read the passage, “It is the last hour,” as if John wanted to show how late it was, and how soon Christ would come: “It is the last hour:”—

And as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

And now, I think, even more than when John wrote, is this the fact, for antichrists are multiplying on all sides and there are even worse evils to come than we have seen as yet! And it, therefore, behooves Christians to be upon the watch and to let this Truth comfort them, that, "it is the last time." Once get through this dispensation, and the battle is ended even though the dispensation should be protracted beyond our hope and desire, yet, still, once get through it and it is over! This is to be the last charge of our great adversary and all his hosts. Stand fast, therefore, you soldiers of the Cross, stand like rocks amidst the onslaught of the waves, and the victory shall yet be yours!

19. *They went out from us.*

For, alas! many of the antichrists came out of the church; they sprang up from among the followers of Christ: “They went out from us,”—

But they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

The worst of men go out from among the best of men. The antichrists go out from the Church of Christ. The raw material for a devil was an angel. To make a Judas, you must make him out of an Apostle! May God purify His professing Church since even in her own loins she breeds adversaries of the faith.

20. *But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*

"You who know God—and even the little children, the babes in Christ, know the Father—know all "things; and you will not be led astray and deceived by these antichrists who have gone out into the world".

You are taught of God, so you know all that is needful for the attainment of true godliness, and the accomplishment of the divine purposes.

21. *I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.*

The truth is all of a piece, and a lie cannot be a part of the truth. Christ does not teach us a Jesuitical system in which error and falsehood are mixed up with truth; the gospel is all truth, and to those who believe it we may say, "Ye know the truth, and ye also know that no lie is of the truth."

22, 23. *Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: [but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*

They who deny the Deity of Christ practically deny the Divine Fatherhood of God. It is not possible for us to understand the rest of truth if we do not believe in Christ, who is the Truth. As the poet says—

"You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of him."

24, 25. *Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the*

beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

Not transient life, but eternal life, is the great promise of the covenant of grace, and abiding in Christ we possess it.

26-29. *These things hath I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you.*

What a wonderful declaration this is—not only that we have this holy anointing, but that we have it always.

And ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him. And now little children, abide in him.

See how the apostle rings out this note again and again. Our Savior repeated the word “abide” or “remain” many times in the short parable of the Vine, and now John strikes this same silver bell over and over again.

That which is the subject of promise is also the subject of precept; and the precepts of the gospel are given to Christians because, in this way, God keeps his own promise, and so leads me to obey his precepts.

That, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

What does he mean by having confidence when he shall appear? Why, this: that if you abide in him when you do not see him, you will be very bold should he suddenly reveal himself. Before he appears, you have dwelt in him, and he has

dwelt in you; what fear could his appearing cause you? Faith has so realized him, that if suddenly he were to appear to the senses, it would be no surprise to you; and, assuredly, it would cause you joy rather than dismay. You would feel that you at last enjoyed what you had long expected, and saw somewhat more closely a friend with whom you had long been familiar.

The other point is, that you should “not be ashamed before him at his coming.” That means, that having regarded him as being absent, you have not so lived that, if he should suddenly be present in person, you would be ashamed of your past life. What must it be to be driven with shame away from his presence into everlasting contempt! The text may have such a meaning. What have you been doing while he has been absent? This is a question for a servant to answer at his Lord’s arrival. You are left in his house to take care of it while he is in the far-off country; and if you have been beating his servants, and eating and drinking with the drunken, you will be greatly ashamed when he returns. His coming will be in itself a judgment.

1 John 3

1. *Behold.*

If you never used your eyes to good purpose before, use them so now:

What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us.

Let the truth of our adoption amaze us—the adoption of such unworthy ones as we were to so high a relationship "that we should be called the sons of God."

Therefore the world knoweth not, because it knew him not.

It does not know the Father, then how should it know the children? It did not know the elder Brother—the firstborn among many brethren—and as it did not know him, how should it know us? As we are called the sons of God, we are to be made like his only-begotten Son; and here is the beginning of the likeness, that, as the world did not know him, and therefore crucified him, so it does not know the other sons of God, and therefore spends its malice upon them whenever it can. Yet what a marvellous thing is this—what a wonder of divine condescension, that we who were the slaves of Satan, the children of disobedience, the heirs of wrath, should be called the sons of God! We can well accept the consequence of such a position without any very great sorrow: "Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

2. *Beloved, now are we the sons of God.*

Consider who we were, and who we are now; ay, and what we feel ourselves to be even when divine grace is powerful in us. And yet, beloved, we are called

“the sons of God.” It is said that when one of the learned heathens was translating this, he stopped and said, “No; it cannot be; let it be written ‘Subjects,’ not ‘Sons,’ for it is impossible we should be called “the sons of God.’ “What a high relationship is that of a son to his father!

What privileges a son has from his father! What liberties a son may take with his father! and oh! what obedience the son owes to his father, and what love the father feels towards the son! But all that, and more than that, we now have through Christ. “Behold! “ye angels! stop, ye seraphs! here is a thing more wonderful than heaven with its walls of jasper. Behold, universe! open thine eyes, O world. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the cons of God; therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” Well, we are content to go with him in his humiliation, for we are to be exalted with him.

And it doth not yet appear what we shall be.

We are made like unto Christ; but when he was here, it did not then appear what he should be. If you had seen the lowly Nazarene, who was “despised and rejected of men,” could you have guessed what he will be in his glory when it shall please God to judge the world by Jesus Christ? So, in like manner, “it cloth not yet appear what we shall be.”

But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall he like him; for we shall see him as he is.

Every spiritual sight of him is transforming. Our looking at him here makes us what we are, our looking at him at the last shall make us like what he is.

Oh! what joy to know that the medicine for our souls is taken in at the eyes of faith, and by the sight of Christ we are healed!

3. *And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

The great object of the Christian’s hope is perfect purification. If we expect to be

like Christ, we look for it in the putting away of sin, and in the girding on of all manner of excellence, and holiness, and loveliness, for therein will lie our likeness to Christ. Oh, that God would give us more and more of this Christ-likeness!

Discouragement and despair will not purify you, doubt and darkness will only make you worse than you were before; but the indulgence of this blessed hope that you are to be like Christ will help you to purify yourself, "even as he is pure." Therefore, beloved, have hope in God. Remember that it is one of Satan's tricks and snares to try to discourage you, but it is God's will to increase your hope, for thereby you increase in purity.

4. *Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law for sin is the transgression of the law.*

And there will never be a better definition of sin than this. However men may philosophically try to mar it, this simple statement will be better than any that they can give us: "Sin is the transgression of the law."

5. *And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.*

Believer, read these words in two senses. He was manifested to take away thy sins that thou hast committed; and that he accomplished, when "the just for the unjust," he sustained the penalties of them. And he was manifested to take away the power of thy sins; that is to say, to conquer thy reigning lusts, to take away thine evil imaginations, to purify thee, and make thee like himself. Well, beloved, what a mercy it is that some one was manifested to take away our sins from us! for some of us have been striving a long, long while, to conquer our sins, and we cannot do it. We thought we had driven them out, but they had "chariots of iron," and we could not overcome them; they lived "in the hill country," and we could not get near them. As often as we worsted them in one battle, they came upon us thick and strong, like an army of locusts; when heaps and heaps had been destroyed they seemed as thick as ever. Ah! but here is a thought—they shall all be taken away. "Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins;" and so he will. The time will come when you and I shall stand without spot or blemish before the throne of God: for they are "without fault

before the throne of God “at this moment, and so shall we be ere long.

6. *Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.*

That is to say, if sin is the habitual course of our life, we do not truly know the Lord. He who walks with God endeavors with all his might to be free from sin, and he is sanctified by abiding in Christ.

This plain, simple verse has been twisted by some who believe in the doctrine of perfection, and they have made it declare that it is possible for some to abide in Christ, and therefore not to sin. But you will remark that it does not say, that some that abide in Christ do not sin; but it says that none who abide in Christ sin. “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not.”

Therefore this passage is not to be applied to a few who attain to what is called by our Arminian friends the fourth degree-perfection; but it appertains to all believers; and of every soul in Christ it may be said, that he sinneth not. In reading the Bible, we read it simply as we would read another book. We ought not to read it as a preacher his text, with the intention of making something out of every word; but we should read it as we find it written: “Whosoever abideth in Christ sinneth not.” Now we are sure that cannot mean that he does not sin at all, but it means that he sins not habitually, he sins not designedly, he sins not finally, so as to perish.

The Bible often calls a man righteous; but that does not mean that he is perfectly righteous. It calls a man a sinner, but it does not imply that he may not have done some good deeds in his life; it means that that is the man’s general character. So with the man who abides in Christ: his general character is not that he is a sinner, but that he is a saint—he sinneth not openly wilfully, before men.

7. *Little children, let no man deceive you.*

Because you are little, you are apt to be deceived. There is a great blessedness in being little children, but there is also some danger connected with such a condition, so we must beware of those who would deceive us.

He that doeth righteousness is righteous; even as he is righteous.

That is the sign of it. Works are the fruits of grace. “He is righteous,”—not in himself; for mark how graces come in here—“He is righteous, even as HE is righteous.” It will not allow our righteousness to be our own, but it brings us to Christ again. “He that doeth righteousness is righteous,” not according to his own works, but “even as HE is righteous.” Good works prove that; have perfect righteousness in Christ; they do not help the righteousness of Christ, nor yet in any way make me righteous. Good works are of no use whatever in the matter of justification: the only use they are, is, that they are for our comfort, for the benefit of others, and for the glory of God. “He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil.”

8. *He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning.*

Ever since he became a devil, he has continued to sin. It was sin that changed the angel into a devil, and a sinner he has always remained.

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

He did not come to make us easy while under the devil’s sway, but to fetch us out from the tyrant’s dominion, and lead us to live a godly, sober, righteous, pure life unto his praise and glory.

9. *Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.*

He sinneth not with any pleasure, it is not the course of his life. There are, alas! in the best of men, infirmities and imperfections and failures would God these were all removed! Still, the man is not what he used to be; though he is not what he shall be, he is not what he once was.

For his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin because he is born of God.

Immortal principles forbid the child of God to sin; the new-born life within us keeps us holy. We have our imperfections and infirmities over which we mourn; but no child of God can live in sin, and love it. He hates it; he is like a sheep that may fall into the mire, but he will not wallow in it, as the swine do. As soon as possible, he is up again out of the mud and the filth. He goes sorrowing, with broken bones, when he perceives that he has grieved his God. His life as a whole is a holy life.

10. *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.*

Some people try to deceive us with the notion that all men are the children of God; but John, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, shows how false that idea is. Holiness and love distinguish the children of God from the children of the devil.

It were well if we always remembered that practical godliness is the sort of godliness; that it is not talking religion, but walking religion which proves a man to be sincere; it is not having a religious tongue, but a religious heart; it is not a religious mouth, but a religious foot. The best evidence is the salvation of the soul. Avaunt! talkative; go thy way, thou mere professing formalist! Your ways lead down to hell, and your end shall be destruction.

Neither he that loveth not his brother.

Love is the essential mark of the true child of God. “God is love;” and, therefore, he that is born of God must love. Hatred, envy, malice, uncharitableness—these are not the things to be found in the children of God; if they are found in you, you are not one of his children.

An unlovely spirit is also self-condemnatory as being an unholy spirit; in fact, want of love is want of righteousness. There are some who profess to be so righteous that they condemn everybody else, and they have no bowels of compassion for those who are suffering in consequence of their fault. But oh, beloved, it is one thing to hate sin, and it is another thing to hate the sinner! Let your indignation burn against everything that is evil; but still, towards him who has done the wrong have ever the gentle thought of pity, and for him present the

prayer that he may leave his sin, and turn unto his gracious God. It may be difficult to reach this point; but there should always be just that happy mixture in the mind and heart of the child of God—love to the sinner and hatred of his sin.

11. *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*

Love is the essential mark of the true child of God. "God is love;" and, therefore, he that is born of God must love. Hatred, envy, malice, uncharitableness—these are not the things to be found in the children of God; if they are found in you, you are not one of his children.

12. *Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*

And there is no hate like that—the hate of a bad man towards a good one, not for doing him any wrong, but simply for rebuking him by the silent eloquence of his holy life. Men who love sin cannot endure the sight of virtue; and if they cannot kill the good man, they will try to kill his reputation. They sneer, and say, "Ah, he is as bad as others, no doubt, if you could only find him out!" That is exactly the spirit of Cain, "who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother." So that, when you see a man filled with hate and envy and malice, it is because his own life is not holy. There is no exception to this rule, true holiness and love always go together; where love is absent, holiness must be absent, too.

13. *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*

As Cain hated Abel, so worldlings hate the saints, whose holiness is a continual rebuke to the ungodly.

14. *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.*

Love becomes the distinguishing mark of the new life.

He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

No matter though he may be outwardly religious, and may think that, by doing certain external actions, he will save himself, there is no truth at all in his religion, for the very essence of true religion is that a man lives not unto himself, but unto God, and for the good of his fellow-men.

15. *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*

What a warning this is against the evil spirit of hate, revenge, and all that kind of feeling! These things are not compatible with the possession of the life of God. Where hatred lives, there is no life of God in the soul. That evil must be shot to the very heart, by the arrows of almighty grace, or else we are not free from the dominion of the devil. Every man who hates another has the venom of murder in his veins. He may never actually take the deadly weapons into his hand and destroy life; but if he wishes that his brother were out of the way, if he would be glad if no such person existed, that feeling amounts to murder in the judgment of God. It is not the lifting of the dagger, nor the mixing of the poison, that is the essence of the grime of murder, it is the hate that prompts the commission of the deadly deed; so, if we never commit the crime, yet, if the hate be in our heart, we are guilty of murder in the sight of God, and eternal life cannot be abiding in us.

16. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.*

“God is love,” and being love, he must display love, nor can he rest with merely speaking of his love. His love must manifest itself in action. More than that, God could not rest until he had made the greatest sacrifice that he could make, and had given up his only-begotten Son to die in the place of sinners. When he had done that, then he could rest in his love. God does not come to us, and say, “Men and women, I love you; and you must believe that I love you although I do nothing for you to prove my love.” He does ask us to believe in his love, but he has given us abundant proofs of it; and, therefore, he has a right to claim our belief in it. The apostle of love tells us, “Hereby we are made to know”—for that would be the real translation of the original—“Hereby we come to know, we do

know, the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." Just as we learn the love of others by seeing what they are prepared to sacrifice for us, so is it even with God himself, we discover, discern, perceive, and are made to know, the love which he bears to us by the fact that "he laid down his life for us."

And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Such self-sacrifice as this is the very highest form of love to the brethren, and is a following of the example of Christ, who "laid down his life for us."

17. *But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*

Perhaps he will do it on what he calls "principle." He thinks it is wrong to help his needy brother, so he says; but however he may put it, the Holy Spirit asks this searching question, "Whose hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

18. *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.*

Love that consists only of words is utterly worthless, if it is true love, it must prove itself by kind deeds and gracious actions.

19. *And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.*

You notice how the apostle constantly writes about knowing. Take your pencil, and underline the word "know" in John's Epistles, and you will be surprised to find how frequently he uses it. He is not one of those who suppose, or fancy, or imagine, or have formed a certain hypothesis; but he knows, and he tells us what he knows, in order that we also may know.

Love hath a knowledge which is peculiarly her own—a full assurance which none can take from her. That is still the test; truthful love proves that "we are of the truth," children of the God of truth, and so assures and tranquillizes our hearts before him. Our hearts shall be calm, confident, and happy before God, when we know that true love flows within them.

20. *For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.*

If you, with your narrow knowledge of right and wrong—your imperfect understanding of your own motives—if you find reason to condemn yourself, what must be your position before the bar of the all-seeing, heart-reading God? That little flutter in thy bosom, my friend, that trembling, that uneasiness, what means it? It not this a forewarning of the sounding of the trumpet of the great assize, when thou wilt have to stand before the Judge of all the earth, and answer for thyself to him? It is easy to deceive thy fellow-man, but it is impossible to deceive thy God.

21. *Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.*

Other people may condemn us, but that does not matter; they may impute to us wrong motives, and misrepresent us, but that is no concern of ours so long as we have confidence toward God.

22. *And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.*

Notice the link between confidence as to our rightness and power in prayer. When a child has done wrong, and knows it, he cannot run to his father, and ask for favors as he used to do; he feels timid in his father's presence because of the sense of his guilt. But if you and I know that we have endeavored with all our heart to love the Lord and our fellow-men and to act righteously in all things, we have a saved confidence which enables us to speak with God as a man speaketh with his friend; and this kind of confidence God greatly loves and he listens to those who possess it. Such people may ask what they will of God; they have

learned to bring their minds into conformity with the will of God's, so the desire of their heart shall be granted to them.

23. *And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.*

My brethren, do you want any warrant for doing a thing better than God's command to do it? The children of Israel borrowed jewels of silver and jewels of gold from the Egyptians. Many, as they read the Bible, find fault with this transaction; but, to my mind, if God bade them do it, that was enough of justification for them. Very well; if God bid thee believe—if this be his commandment that thou believe—canst thou want a better warrant? I say, is there any necessity for any other. Surely the Lord's Word is enough.

And love one another, as he gave us commandment.

Faith and love—faith in Christ, and love to one another—are here most happily joined together; let us never put them asunder.

24. *And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.*

It is one of a child's ways to love its home. The good child to whose requests its father always listens, loves no place so much as the dear old house where its parents live. Now he who loves and keeps God's commandments is said to dwell in him—he has made the Lord his dwelling place, and abides in holy familiarity with God.

And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

If he hath given us the Spirit of Christ, then Christ himself is in us, if he hath given us the Spirit of love, that also is the evidence that Christ himself abideth in us. Oh, for more of that blessed Spirit in every one of us!

1 John 4

1. *Beloved, believe not every spirit.*

A simpleton believes every word that he hears, but “the wise man’s eyes are in his head,” so he examines what he sees and hears, and does not blindly accept whatever may be told to him. This is an injunction of which there is great need in the present day, when so many accept anything that they hear from a “priest” or from a pastor without searching the Scriptures to see whether what they hear is in accordance with the inspired Word.

But try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

It was so in John’s day: it is so in these days. If there were only one false prophet, we should have need to be on our guard, but “many false prophets are gone out into the world.” If false prophets were all shut up in a cage, and we had to go to seek them, there might be some danger to be apprehended from them, but there is so much more danger now that we can truly read, “Many false prophets are gone out into the world.”

2. *Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.*

If the doctrine of the incarnation of God in Christ is denied, as it was by the first heretics, we may conclude that the Spirit of God is not in such teaching. Any doctrine which dishonors Christ—whether in his person, or his offices, or his atonement, or in any other way—you may at once conclude is not of God, for that which comes from the Spirit of God glorifies Christ. Did not our Lord himself say, concerning the Holy Spirit, “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive

of mine, and shall skew it unto you”?

3. *And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.*

There were deadly errors very early in the history of the Christian Church. The loving apostle John did not handle them with gloved hands, but he dealt with them honestly and sought to destroy them. We must not wonder if, in our days, the church has many heresies in it; but they are not to be tolerated, but to be out up, root and branch.

If there is any question raised about the Deity and the humanity of Christ, do not listen any longer. When you taste the first morsel of meat from a joint, and you find that it is tainted, there is no necessity for you to eat all the rest to see if it is good; and if any man questions the true Divinity and the real humanity of Christ, have nothing to do with him, and give no heed to what he says, for he “is not of God.”

And this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

That was the form that antichrist took in John’s day. It is constantly taking different forms, but it is always anti-Christ—against Christ.

4. *Ye are of God, little children.*

Ye who are trusting in Jesus, and are born again of his Spirit, though you may have only a small influence with others, and are but as little children in your own esteem, yet “ye are of God.”

And have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.

The people of God are few, feeble, and weak; but there is a Spirit in them mightier than the spirit of the world; and, as the ultimate victory will depend

upon the strength of the indwelling Spirit, the Church of God will yet overcome the world that lieth in the wicked one.

If it were a conflict between you and others who had the Spirit of God within them, the conflict would be grievous, and the issue of it would be doubtful; but now that the struggle is between the Spirit of God who is in you and the spirit of error that is in the world, you need have no question about the ultimate result of the battle.

5. *They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.*

These false prophets teach doctrines that suit carnal men: “They are of the world, therefore speak they of the world.” They take their cue from “the spirit of the age.” They speak according to the fashion of the world, and therefore it is no wonder that the world heareth them.

When people say to you, “Everybody says so-and-so,” that is not the reason why you should believe it. “All the men of advanced thought—all the scholars of the age, speak thus;” yes, just so: “They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.”

6. *We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.*

Here is an inspired answer to those who say that they attach no importance to the apostles. They profess to be the followers of Christ, but they say that they do not agree with Paul and with John. Very well; John speaks in the name of all the apostles when he says, “He that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.”

The apostles spake as men sent from God, for the Spirit of God dwelt in them; and they alone know the truth who keep to that which has been revealed to us through his holy apostles and prophets. If apostolic teaching be denied, those who deny it are not of God, for the Spirit of God was in the apostles, as he is also in all the Lord’s true children. By this test we may try many of the spirits of the present day. The apostle now gives us another infallible test by which we

may “try the spirits.”

Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

If you reject any part of the Word of God, the spirit of error is within you.

Truth is one, and the revelation of God is one, let us not rend it, let us hold fast by it all, and so prove that the Spirit of truth is in us.

7. *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*

The spirit of love, kindness, self-sacrifice, holy charity—this is of God. This is the distinguishing mark of the Christian dispensation, the distinguishing mark of the Christian, that he abounds in love, not in malice, anger, revenge, bitterness.

From the abundance of love which was in John’s heart, we might almost be startled at the very strong things that he writes against those who are in error, did we not remember that it is only a false charity which winks at error. He is the most loving man who has honesty enough to tell the truth, and to speak out boldly against falsehood. It is very easy to pass through this world believing and saying that everybody is right. That is the way to make a soft path for your own feet, and to show that you only have love to yourself; but sometimes to speak as John the Baptist spoke, or as Martin Luther spoke, is the way to prove that you have true love to others.

8. *He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*

He may be very orthodox, but if he does not love, he does not know God, and if he does not know God, what does he know? There is such a thing as holding the truth in bitterness, but those who know God, and are truly his children, hold the truth in love.

I have known men, professing to be Christians, at enmity with their brothers. I have heard of a father and a son who have not spoken to one another for months. Did I hear of a mother and a daughter who would not speak to each other, and of sisters who had fallen out? This will not do; you must either give up your

Christian profession or give up your hatred. The very attempt to combine enmity and Christianity is a sin against God.

9. *In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.*

There is love in our creation; there is love in providence; but most of all there is love in the gift of Christ for our redemption. The apostle here seems to say, "Now that I have found the great secret of God's love to us; here is the clearest evidence of divine love that ever was or ever can be manifested toward the sons of men."

10. *Herein is love.*

"Herein is love," says the apostle, as though you could find it nowhere else as it is here. Here is the height and depth of love immeasurable; here is love summed up, here is love's climax.

Not that we loved God.

By nature, we had no love to God; we were his enemies. We loved sin, and we had ruined ourselves by it; but God took out of his own bosom the only Son he had, that he might make reconciliation for us, and put away our sin.

But that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The gift of Christ; the needful propitiation for our sins, was all of love on God's part. Justice demanded the propitiation, but love applied it. God could not be just if he pardoned sin without atonement; but the greatness of the love is seen in the fact that it moved the Father to give his Son to an ignominious death, that he might pardon sinners and yet be just.

11. *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*

Here we have a fact and an argument. We ought to love. We ought to love after God's fashion; not because men loved us. Nor because they deserve anything at our hands. We are too apt to look at the worthiness of those whom we help; but our God is gracious to the unthankful and to the evil.

He makes his sun to rise and rain to fall for the unjust as well as for the righteous, therefore we ought to love the unlovely and the unloving. But just as God has a special love for his own people, we who believe in him ought to have a peculiar affection for all who are his.

12. *No man hath seen God at any time.*

We do not need to see him to love him. Love knows how good he is, though she hath not beheld him. Blessed are they who have not seen God, yet who love him with heart, and mind, and strength.

If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

"God dwelleth in us" though we do not see him. The nearest approach we can have to God is by this golden way of love. He is not far to seek. If you love one another, God is in you; he dwells in you, he is your nearest and dearest Friend, the Author of all other love. The grace of love comes from the God of love.

13. *Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.*

And his Spirit is the spirit of love. Wherever it comes, it makes man love his fellow-man and seek his good; and if you have that love in your heart, it came from God, and you dwell in God.

14. *We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.*

John could testify as an eye-witness to the sufferings and death of Christ, for he

stood at the foot of the cross, and saw the Savior die, and he had aforetime laid his head upon his Master's breast. He knew that Christ was real flesh and blood, and he knew that Christ really died, so he could truly say, "We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world."

15. *Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he is God.*

Let Christ be God to you, and you are saved. If, in every deed, and of a truth. You take him to be the Son of God, and consequently rest your eternal hopes on him, God dwells in you, and you dwell in God.

16. *And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us.*

How far is this true of all of you? How many here can join with the beloved apostle, and say, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us"? We know it; we have felt it; we are under its power. We know it still, it remains a matter of faith to us; we believe it. We have a double hold of it. "We know," we are not agnostics. "We believe," we are not unbelievers.

God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

This is not mere benevolence; there are many benevolent people who still do not dwell in love. They wish well to their fellow-men; but not to all. They are full of indignation at certain men for the wrong that they have done them. John's words teach us that there is a way of living in which you are in accord with God, and with all mankind; you have passed out of the region of enmity into the realm of love. When you have come there, by the grace of God, then God dwells in you, and you dwell in him.

Is there anyone who is full of anger, enmity, malice, and envy? If so, let him know that God dwells not in the heart that harbors such abominations. Until these base passions are expelled, and we feel love to all mankind for Christ's sake, God is not in us, for "he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." The old method, according to Jewish tradition, was, "Thou shalt love thy

neighbor, and hate thine enemy;" but Christ's new rule is, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven." This is the point in which our likeness to God will be seen, for he loved us when we were his enemies, and he expects his children to love their enemies; may he graciously teach us that sacred art!

17. *Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have a boldness in the day of judgment.*

That is a wonderful expression, "boldness in the day of judgment." According to some, the saints will not be in the day of judgment. Then, what is the use of "boldness in the day of judgment"? As I read my Bible, we shall all be there, and we shall all give an account unto God. I shall be glad to be there, to be judged for the deeds done in my body; not that I hope to be saved by them, but because I shall have a perfect answer to all accusations on account of my sin. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." If I am a believer in Christ—

> "Bold shall I stand in that grand day,
> For who aught to my charge shall I lay?
> While through thy blood absolved I am
> From sin's tremendous curse and shame."

Because as he is, so are we in this world.

Happy Christian men, who can say that? If you live among men as Christ lived among men, if you are a savior to them in your measure, if you love them, if you try to exhibit the lovely traits of character that were in Christ, happy are you. If we can be to the world, in our poor feeble measure, what God is to it—fountains of love, dispensaries of goodness—then we need not be afraid of the verdict even of the great day of judgment.

18. *There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*

If a man is conscious that he intends no harm to anyone, that he wishes good to all mankind, that he loves his God, and loves his fellowmen for God's sake, what has he to fear? He becomes the bravest of the brave, and often finds himself safe and unharmed in places where others dare not go.

When a man loves with a perfect love, he escapes from bondage. There is a loving, holy fear, which is never cast out. Filial fear grows as love grows. That sacred dread, that solemn awe of God, we must ever cultivate; but we are not afraid of him. Dear heart, God is your best Friend, your choicest love.

"Yea, mine own God is he," you can say; and you have no fear of him now.

You long to approach him. Though he is a consuming fire, you know that he will only consume what you want to have consumed; and will purify you, and make your gold to shine more brightly because the consumable alloy is gone from it. He will not consume you, but only that which would work for your hurt if it were left within you. Refining fire, go through my heart! Consume as thou wilt! I long to have sin consumed, that I may be like my God. Say you not so, my brethren?

19. *We love him, because he first loved us.*

The reason for our love is found in free grace. God first loved us, and now we must love him; we cannot help it. It sometimes seems too much for a poor sinner to talk about loving God. If an emmet or a snail were to say that it loved a queen, you would think it strange, that it should look so high for an object of affection; but there is no distance between an insect and a man compared with the distance between man and God. Yet love doth fling a flying bridge from our manhood up to his Godhead. "We love him, because he first loved us." If he could come down to us, we can go up to him. If his love could come down to such unworthy creatures as we are, then our poor love can find wings with which to mount up to him.

20. *If a man say, I love God.*

Not, "if a man love God," but if a man say, "I love God." It is a blessed thing to be able to say, "I love God," when God himself can bear witness to the truth of

our statement; but the apostle says, If a man say, I love God—

20. *And hateth his brother, he is a liar.*

John! John! John! This is a very strong expression. Did we not always understand that John was full of affection? Yes, but he was not one of those oily, sugary sort of people who cannot speak the truth. There is no real love in that kind of man; he has only the mere pretense of love. John speaks sharply because he loves ardently. True love hates that which is unlovely. It is inevitable that a man, who is full of love, should feel intense indignation against that which is contrary to love. Hence the apostle says, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar."

For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

The word "brother" is to be understood in the widest possible sense. We are all brothers, springing from the same common parent; and therefore we ought to be philanthropists, lovers of man, loving even the guilty and the worthless, having an earnest desire to do good even to those who do us ill. If we have not yet reached that spirit, we had need begin our true Christian life, at the foot of the cross, by trusting and loving him who there died out of love for sinners; for there only can we learn, in the person of Christ Jesus our Lord, this divine philosophy of love to God and men.

21. *And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.*

This is that "new commandment" which our Lord gave to his apostles, and through them to his whole church. "That ye love one another as I have loved you." John was, in a special sense, "that disciple whom Jesus loved."

It was meet, therefore, that he should be the apostle to be inspired by the Holy Spirit to bring "this commandment" to the remembrance of any who had forgotten it. "This commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." God help us so to do, of his great grace!

1 John 5

1. *Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.*

These are very simple words, but they contain a great depth of meaning. The teaching conveyed by this Epistle is very profound, though the language is such as even a child can understand. Where there is real faith in Jesus Christ as the Anointed of God, there is the evidence that the new birth has taken place. Let the first, the best, and the clearest proof of our regeneration be the fact that we do verily and in our heart believe that Jesus is the Christ.

And every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

If we love the Father, we lave the Son. If we love God, we love all his people; all who are born into the divine family are the objects of our affection.

2. *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.*

For love leads to imitation. If we truly love the children of God we shall imitate them; and they are known by these distinguishing characteristics, that they love their Heavenly Father, and keep his commandments.

3. *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.*

Not that we talk about our experience; not, that we use endearing expressions concerning the Savior; not, that we are attentive to outward religious ordinances; but “this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” A holy life is the

best possible proof of true love to God.

Obedience is the flower of love. Where obedience to God does not exist, no love to God exists. It is a mockery for us to talk about emotions of the heart if there are not actions that correspond with them.

And his commandments are not grievous.

To his people, they are charming; not grievous. They delight themselves in the law of God; and they only wish that they could be perfectly conformed to the divine will.

4. *For whatsoever or is born of God overcometh the world.*

The new life is the conquering life; the old must give place to the new. The world, that is one day to be finally overthrown, is already overcome by the child of God.

And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

For it brings a better and brighter world before us; and, opening to us the eternal, takes away from us the charms and allurements of the temporal. And the apostle gives a description of what kind of faith it is that overcometh the world.

5. *Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?*

No one else can overcome the world; but where there is true faith in Christ, it creates within the heart a holy valor by which the conquest of the world is achieved. The law tells us to overcome the world, but the gospel of God’s grace enables us to do it. The legal spirit know that it ought to conquer the world, but —the evangelical spirit does conquer it.

So that, it is faith in Jesus which is, first of all, the evidence of the new birth, and which is, afterwards, the weapon wielded by the new-born soul, with which it fights till it gains the victory over the world.

6. *This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.*

The cleansing of the outward life does not stand alone, but it is accompanied by the putting away of sin from the heart. The two must go together; and no man will ever rightly value the cleansing water unless he equally values the atoning blood. It is said, by some, that the preaching of the doctrine of the full and free forgiveness of sin, which is bestowed upon all who exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will load men to carelessness of life; but it has quite the opposite effect. The cleansing of the life, by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word, becomes incumbent upon us when once we are washed from sin in the precious blood of Jesus. The atonement is the true guarantee of holiness.

7, 8. *For there are three that testify: the spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three are in one.*

What a blessing it is for us to get the witness of these three, even here on earth, in the new life which is created within our souls by the Holy Spirit, the daily cleansing of our life by that same blessed Spirit through the Word, and the continual application by the Spirit of that precious blood by which peace is given to the conscience, and sin is put away from the heart.

9-11. *If we receive the witness of men.*

—And we are constantly obliged to do that, for we could not get on at all if we did not believe our fellow-men; yet—

The witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.

That very faith becomes to him the best witness, and he himself is able to confirm the witness of his faith that he is a partaker of the salvation of Christ.

He that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

That is the gospel in brief, what Luther would have called a little Bible, containing a condensation of the whole revelation of God.

12. *He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*

Ah, then, my soul, if thou hast, by faith, embraced the Son of God, thou hast a life which can never die! Thou hast the life of God within thee; thou hast heaven begun within thee; and thou hast it now. Dear hearer, hast thou the Son of God? Hast thou taken him to thyself by a distinct believing grasp, saying, "This Christ shall be mine—this blessed Jesus shall be my Savior"? Then, you have the apostle's inspired declaration, "He that hath the Son hath life;" and his other declaration is equally true, "He that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

13. *These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*

The apostle said that they did believe, yet he wrote to them that they might believe on the name of the Son of God; because, he that believeth needs to believe more—more as to matter, and more as to the firmness of the grip of his faith. There are some who do really believe on Christ who do not know that they have eternal life. They have it, but they scarcely realize that they have it; they are afraid to believe that it is theirs. But, here, the Holy Ghost assures us, through the apostle, that those who believe on the name of the Son of God have eternal life. Oh, what a comfort this is! Then, you can never perish. There are some who say that you can fall from grace; but how can that be? What kind of life would that be? It would be temporary life. But the Scripture saith, He that believeth On the Son hath everlasting life." Then, if it be everlasting, it is everlasting, and there cannot be any end to it.

14. *And this is the confidence that, we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.*

We do not wish to have a more unlimited promise than that; we do not ask God to hear our prayer if it is not according to his will. The true child of God does not wish to have his own will; but he says, “No, Lord; thou knowest much better than I do what to grant; so, when my will is contrary to thy will, thy will, not mine, be done! This is as gracious an assurance of answers to prayer as the true children of God wish to have: If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.”

15. *And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.*

That is, before we actually receive the answers to our petitions. After the prayer of faith, we know that our request has been granted, and we act upon the belief that we have already received what we asked of God. A true man’s promise is as good as the performance of it; we unhesitatingly take a note of hand, or a promise to pay, when we know that it is drawn upon a reliable firm. We treat it as money; it passes from hand to hand, through the bankers, and is regarded as if it were the coin itself;-then, shall we not treat our God in this fashion when we have his promise to pay or to give? We have pleaded it in prayer; so, let us rise from our knees, not merely hoping that we shall receive what we have asked, but believing that we shall surely have it: “If we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”

16. *He shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.*

John does not say that he may not; and as we cannot be absolutely rare that any sin is a sin unto death, this verse does not prevent us from praying for any man, whatever his sin may have been. John says, writing under inspiration, “There is a sin unto death.” “What is it?” someone asks. Ah! would you not like to know? If you did know that, you could go and commit all other sins except that one, could you not; but would that be any help to your piety? Certainly not. You know that, sometimes, a notice to this effect is put up as a warning, “Man-traps and spring

guns set on these premises;" but do you go, and knock at the door, and say, "Will you kindly tell me where the man-traps and spring guns are?" No, for it is the fact that you do not know where they are that keeps you out of the premises. In like manner, somewhere in the fields of sin, there is one great man-trap which John calls "a sin unto death;" but you need not want to know what that sin is, nor where that trap is set; your business is to keep as far away from all sin as ever you can, whether it is unto death, or not unto death.

17. *All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.*

If a thing is not right—if it is not right all round, it is sin, be you sure of that. I heard, the other day, of a man who was said to be a splendid Christian Godwards, but a wretched creature manwards; but there cannot be such a monstrosity as that. Such a man as that was not a Christian at all. Our righteousness, if it is real and true, must be an all-round righteousness, towards men as well as towards God.

18. *We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.*

That is to say, sin is not the bent of his renewed nature; it would not be a fair description of his life to say that he was living a sinful life. There are spots in the sun, but the sun itself is a great mass of brightness. So is it with the Christian's life; it is not a sinful life although there are imperfections in it.

19–21. *And we knew that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*

At the time of the Reformation, there was a general order that this text should be put round the communion tables. I think it is time that it was put round the communion tables again. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols;"—for that

is one place where idols are often found, though not by any means the only one.

21. *Amen.*

And we say, “Amen; so let it be.”

2 JOHN

1, 2. *The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; for the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.*

Once let the truth of God obtain an entrance into the human heart and subdue the whole man unto itself, no power human or infernal can dislodge it. We entertain it not as a guest but as the master of the house—this is a Christian necessity, he is no Christian who doth not thus believe. Those who feel the vital power of the gospel, and know the might of the Holy Ghost as He opens, applies, and seals the Lord's Word, would sooner be torn to pieces than be rent away from the gospel of their salvation.

What a thousand mercies are wrapt up in the assurance that the truth will be with us for ever; will be our living support, our dying comfort, our rising song, our eternal glory; this is Christian privilege, without it our faith were little worth. Some truths we outgrow and leave behind, for they are but rudiments and lessons for beginners, but we cannot thus deal with Divine truth, for though it is sweet food for babes, it is in the highest sense strong meat for men.

Wherever this abiding love of truth can be discovered, we are bound to exercise our love. No narrow circle can contain our gracious sympathies, wide as the election of grace must be our communion of heart. Much of error may be mingled with truth received, let us war with the error but still love the brother for the measure of truth which we see in Him; above all let us love and spread the truth ourselves.

3, 4. *Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we*

have received a commandment from the Father.

When our children walk in truth and love to God, it makes us rejoice that another heart is consecrated to his service. We may well rejoice in the salvation and in the sanctification of our sons and daughters, because this is the way in which the kingdom of Christ is to be extended in the world. The hand which has held the standard aloft in the midst of the fury of war is at last palsied in death: happy is that standard-bearer who with expiring eye can see his own son springing forward to grasp that staff, and keep the banner still floating above the host.

5. *And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.*

The old commandment is the word which we have heard from the beginning, yet it is always fresh and new. Love is the essential mark of the true child of God. "God is love;" and, therefore, he that is born of God must love. Hatred, envy, malice, uncharitableness—these are not the things to be found in the children of God; if they are found in you, you are not one of his children.

6. *And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.*

A holy life is the best possible proof of true love to God. Obedience is the flower of love. Where obedience to God does not exist, no love to God exists. It is a mockery for us to talk about emotions of the heart if there are not actions that correspond with them.

7. *For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.*

There were deadly errors very early in the history of the Christian Church. The loving apostle John did not handle them with gloved hands, but he dealt with them honestly and sought to destroy them. We must not wonder if, in our days,

the church has many heresies in it; but they are not to be tolerated, but to be out up, root and branch.

If there is any question raised about the Deity and the humanity of Christ, do not listen any longer. When you taste the first morsel of meat from a joint, and you find that it is tainted, there is no necessity for you to eat all the rest to see if it is good; and if any man questions the true Divinity and the real humanity of Christ, have nothing to do with him, and give no heed to what he says, for he "is not of God."

8. *Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.*

Do not lose the victories which you have already gained. If it was wise to go so far, it will be wise to go on to the end. I recollect going over the Col D'Obbia on the Alps, and when I got a little way down I found myself on a steep mountain side upon a mass of loose earth and slates. There seemed to me to be some miles of almost perpendicular descent and no road. My head began to swim. I set my feet fast down in the loose soil, turned my back to the scene below me, and my face to the hill-side, and stuck my hands into the earth to hold as best I could. I cried to my friend, "I shall never go down there: I will go back." He coolly replied, "Just look where you have come from." When I looked up it appeared to be much worse to try and clamber up than it could possibly be to go down, and so he remarked, "I think you had better go on, for it is worse going back." So we must go on, for it will be worse going back. Let us gird up the loins of our mind, and push onward with firm resolution, by the help of the Spirit of God.

9. *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.*

They who deny the Deity of Christ practically deny the Divine Fatherhood of God. It is not possible for us to understand the rest of truth if we do not believe in Christ, who is the Truth. As the poet says—

"You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of him."

10, 11. *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*

When a man is known to suffer from a sadly contagious disease none of his friends will come near the house. There is little need to warn them off: they are all too alarmed to come near. Why is it men are not as much afraid of the contagion of vice? How dare they run risks for themselves and children by allowing evil companions to frequent their house? Sin is as infectious and far more deadly than the smallpox or fever.

12, 13. *Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full. The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.*

Let our joy be living water from those sacred wells which the Lord himself has digged; may his joy abide in us, that our joy may be full. Of Christ’s joy we cannot have too much; no fear of running to excess when his love is the wine we drink. Oh to be plunged in this pure stream of spiritual delights!

3 JOHN

1, 2. *The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.*

We may ask for prosperity for our friends; especially if, like Gaius, they serve God and his cause with their substance. “And be in health.” This is necessary to the enjoyment of prosperity. What would all else be without it? “Even as thy soul prospereth.” We are startled at this wish: the spiritual health of Gaius is made the standard of his outward prosperity! Dare we pray thus for many of our friends? Dare we pray thus for ourselves? What would be the result if such a prayer were answered?

3. *For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.*

The truth was in Gaius, and Gaius walked in a the truth. If the first had not been the case, the second could never have occurred; and if the second could not be said of him the first would have been a mere pretence. Truth must enter into the soul, penetrate and saturate it, or else it is of no value. Doctrines held as a matter of creed are like bread in the hand, which ministers no nourishment to the frame; but doctrine accepted by the heart, is as food digested, which, by assimilation, sustains and builds up the body. In us truth must be a living force, an active energy, an indwelling reality, a part of the woof and warp of our being. To walk in the truth, imports a life of integrity, holiness, faithfulness, and simplicity—the natural product of those principles of truth which the gospel teaches, and which the Spirit of God enables us to receive. We may judge of the secrets of the soul by their manifestation in the man’s conversation.

4. *I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.*

John was not after the flesh the father of those of whom he was writing; he was their spiritual father, it was through his ministry that they had been brought into the now life; his relationship to them was that he had been the instrument of their conversion, and had afterwards displayed a father's care in supplying them with heavenly food and gracious teaching.

No minister ought to be at rest unless he sees that his ministry does bring forth fruit, and men and women are born unto God by the preaching of the Word. Those who are the preacher's children are often known to him; they were to John, else he could not have spoken of them as "my children," and could not have had joy in them as his children. From this I draw the inference that it is the duty of every one who receives spiritual benefit, and especially conversion, from any of God's servants, to let them know it. Put on Christ publicly in baptism, according to His command: unite yourself with His Church, and commune with the people among whom you have been born unto God.

5-8. *Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.*

Some people will never entertain angels unawares, for they never entertain anybody. May we be given to hospitality, for that should be part of the character of saints.

9, 10. *I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.*

“Diotrephes loveth to have the preeminence,” and that fellow has spoiled many a happy church. A man does not want, perhaps, to be pre-eminent, but then he is afraid that another should be, and so he would have him put down. Thus brethren are finding fault, they are afraid that such an one will go too fast, and that such another will go too fast. The best way is to try to go as fast as he does. It is of no use finding fault because some may have a little pre-eminence. After all, what is the pre-eminence. It is the pre-eminence of one little animalcule over another.

How many are trying to have some dignity and power over their fellow Christians, instead of remembering that it is the fundamental rule of all our churches, that there all men are equal-alike brethren, alike to be received as such.

11. *Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.*

That is to say, if sin is the habitual course of our life, we do not truly know the Lord. He who walks with God endeavors with all his might to be free from sin.

The Bible often calls a man righteous; but that does not mean that he is perfectly righteous. It calls a man a sinner, but it does not imply that he may not have done some good deeds in his life; it means that that is the man’s general character. So with the man who abides in Christ: his general character is not that he is a sinner, but that he is a saint—he sinneth not openly wilfully, before men.

12-14. *Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true. I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: but I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.*

Blessed men scatter blessings. When the benediction of God rests on us we pour out benedictions upon others. It was the old custom with apostolic men to say, as they entered a house, “Peace be unto this house.” We have given up all idea of blessing our fellow-men in that way. But why have you done so? Is it from a want of love, or want of faith in our own prayer that God would make it even so?

For my part, I value a good man’s blessing. As I drove up a hill, in the country, some time ago, a poor man and his wife were walking down the hill. I had never seen them before; but the woman pulled the husband by his coat; they both stood and looked at me, and at last she said, quite loudly, “It’s him, God bless him!” and although her greeting was not quite grammatical, it evidently came from her heart, and I felt happier for it, as I went on my way. I saw her afterwards, and asked her the reason of he words, “Why,” she said, “I have read your sermons for many a year, and I could not help saying, ‘God bless him!’ when I saw you, for you have been a blessing to me.” Thus that humble woman, being blessed of the Lord, became a blessing to me; and we all of us, even the most obscure, who know the grace of God, might daily be like a great benediction in the midst of the people.

JUDE

1. *Jude,*

That is to say Judas, not Iscariot.

the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James.

He does not say, “and brother of our Lord,” for we know that James and Judas were, both of them, among the Lord’s kinsman according to the flesh. But now, after the flesh, knows he Christ no more, but is content and happy to be known as “the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James.”

To them that are sanctified by God the Father

For the decree of election, the setting apart of the chosen is usually ascribed unto God the Father.

and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called.

We have here a very blessed description of the whole work of our salvation—set apart by the Father, joined unto Christ and preserved in Him—and then, in due time, called out by the Spirit of God.

2. *Mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied.*

Our holy faith breeds in us the best wishes for others. As we desire to find mercy, ourselves, so do we long that others, also, should find mercy and, as we rejoice in the peace and love which the Holy Spirit works in us, we desire that

others may partake of the same spiritual benefits. Hence the Apostles usually begin their Epistles with these good wishes which are not mere wishes, but earnest prayers and Inspired benedictions. May we breathe such petitions wherever we go! Let us wish no man any ill, even in the most exciting and trying times, and under the greatest provocation, but let us still breathe out this prayer, "Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied."

3. *Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was necessary for me to write unto you and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith that was once delivered unto the saints.*

These godly men, though they wrote under divine Inspiration, yet stirred themselves up that they might be in a right condition of mind and heart. Even though the pen does not, by itself, write, yet it is well that it is not corroded, lest it answer not to the hand that uses it. So Jude says, "I gave all diligence to write unto you." All the diligence of Jude, by itself, could not have written this Epistle! Still, while depending upon divine guidance, he was no mere passive agent—he gave all diligence to the accomplishment of his task. Jude wrote of "the common salvation," for there is but one. He was writing a general Epistle, a catholic Epistle, to all sorts of persons all over the world and he, therefore, wrote of "the common salvation." There is but one salvation—there cannot be another. There are some who trouble us, as some troubled the Christians in the Apostles' day, by preaching "another gospel, which is not another," but there is only one salvation. "It was necessary," says the Apostle, "for me to write unto you." And oh, how necessary it still is to preach the gospel and to warn men against defections from it! Jude continues, "It was necessary for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all" (that is the correct rendering) "delivered to the saints." The faith is not a growth. It is not an evolution. It was once for all delivered to the saints and the great business of the saints, the holy, the saintly among men, is to defend, if necessary with their lives, the faith once delivered unto them! We are put in trust with the gospel, we are trustees of a divine deposit of invaluable truth. And we must be true to our trust at all costs. It was necessary for Jude to write as he did, for he had further to say—

4. *For there are certain men crept in unawares,*

They did not boldly avow their heresy when they came in—they would not have been allowed to enter if they had done so—but they sneaked in, they climbed into the pulpit, professing to be preachers of the gospel when they knew, all along, that they intended to undermine it. Basest of all men are those who act thus! "There are certain men crept in unawares."

who were before of old ordained to this condemnation,

Proscribed by God as traitors long ago! Those who have not the courage of their convictions probably have no convictions at all, but seek to undermine the faith which they profess to hold.

ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

These are two vital points in which many have erred—either separating holiness of life from orthodoxy of belief—or denying the Divinity and the supremacy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing could more discredit the gospel than the first error, that of turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. And nothing could more injure the gospel than the second error, that of "denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

5. *I will therefore put you in remembrance, though you once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.*

So you may get in among the spiritual children of Israel, you may share their privileges, you may sing the Red Sea song of triumph and yet, after all, if there is not real living faith within your soul, God will as surely destroy you as He destroyed the unbelieving Israelites! Those myriads of graves in the wilderness are as sure a token of God's hatred of sin as the drowning of Pharaoh's chariots and horsemen in the Red Sea! Beware, then, of having a form of faith which does not purify your lives, a profession of belief in Christ which allows you to live in sin with impunity, for if you have this, however near you may seem to be to the people of God, even if you are counted in with them, yet God will not reckon you as His, for He is the same Lord who "afterward destroyed them that

believed not."

6. *And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.*

See, then, the need of stability, the need of abiding in the faith and abiding in the practice of it, lest we should turn out to be like the Israelites, who, though they came out of Egypt, left their carcasses in the wilderness, or like the angels, who, though they once stood in God's Presence in Glory, have fallen to the deeps of the abyss because of their apostasy!

7. *Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*

Whatever the new gods, newly come up, that some preach, nowadays, may be or may not be, "our God is a consuming fire," our God is one who takes vengeance upon iniquity and who will by no means spare the guilty! He is as terribly just as He is divinely gracious—let us bow before Him.

8. *Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion and speak evil of dignitaries.*

They cast off all restraint; they claim to have liberty to do whatever they like—and when reproved, they utter railing words against those who honestly rebuke them! What a strange thing it is that such evils should spring up in the nominal Church of God! I suppose that out of the professing Church, there have come more monstrous evils than have been nursed in the world, itself! Why, even in these days, we have had those who have professed perfection, who have given themselves over to abominable evils and who have even taught them as a part of their perfection! Ah, me! To what depths of infamy will not men go! Under the very guise of holiness, the most loathsome iniquity has been practiced. Unless the grace of God prevents, that which is best rots into that which is worst. You

could not make a devil except with an angel for the raw material—a Judas Iscariot could only be produced out of an Apostle of Jesus Christ—and it was into the nominal Church of God that these filthy dreamers of whom Jude wrote had come. They were also, according to the Apostle, those who "despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities," those who quibble at everything that is right and good, and seek to pull down everything that comes to them with authority, especially everything that is of divine authority.

9. *Yet Michael the Archangel, when contending with the devil when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke you.*

To what does this refer? I am sure I do not know. I cannot think it refers to anything recorded in the Old Testament, but to some fact, known to Jude, who here speaks by Revelation and records it. We believe it and learn from it that when an archangel disputes with the devil, he does not use hard words even against him, for hard words are an evidence of the weakness of the cause which they are used to support! Hard arguments softly put, are the really effective weapons, but it takes some of us a long time to learn this and generally, in our younger days, we wear away our own strength by the violence with which we use it.

10. *But these speak evil of those things which they know not,*

Very generally it is so—those who revile Holy Scripture are usually persons who have not read the Bible. They "speak evil of those things which they know not."

but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

It is a horrible thing when a man's sin goes the full length of his knowledge and he sins up to the degree of his possibilities!

11. 12. *Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the*

gainsaying of Korah. These are spots

"These are spoilers," so it may be rendered.

in your feasts of charity,

They spoil your love feasts at the Communion Table. They mar your fellowship when you gather together for worship.

when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear.

Some of the best Christians who come to the Lord's Table, come there in great fear and trembling. And I have known some who have had an undoubted right to be there, half afraid to come. Yet those very persons who have a holy fear lest they should come amiss, are those who really ought to come. "Feeding themselves without fear" is the mark of those who are further off from God.

Clouds they are without water, carried about of winds,

They believe according to what is said to them by the last man who speaks to them—they are easily persuaded to this doctrine, and to that, and the other.

trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots

They seem to be bearing fruit, but it drops off before it ripens.

13. *Raging waves of the sea.*

They have nothing to say for Christ, yet they must say something, so they are "raging waves of the sea."

foaming out their own shame, wandering stars, to whom is reserved

the thickness of darkness forever.

These are the false professors of religion, the members of the church for whom there are seats reserved in Hell! This is a dreadful thought—"to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever"—not for the heathen, not for the open refusers of the gospel, but for such as creep into the churches unawares, teach false doctrine, live unholy lives!

14, 15. *And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.*

When Enoch thus prophesied, we do not know. That he did so was revealed to Jude and he, here, tells us of it. It was profitable for us that so pointed and plain a testimony of Enoch should not be lost.

16, 17. *These are murmurers, complainers,*

You know the sort of people alluded to here, nothing ever satisfies them. They are discontented even with the gospel. The bread of Heaven must be cut into three pieces and served on dainty napkins, or else they cannot eat it! And very soon their soul loathes even this light bread. There is no way by which a Christian can serve God so as to please them. They will pick holes in every preacher's coat and if the great High Priest, Himself, were here, they would find fault with the color of the stones of His breastplate!

walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaks great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before of the Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude gives a summary of warnings uttered by Paul, Peter and James.

18. *How that they told you there should be mockers in the last time who should talk after their own ungodly lusts.*

People who must, if they make a profession of religion at all, be continually breaking up churches and holding themselves aloof from others, having no fellowship with anybody but those who can say “shibboleth” as plainly as they can, and sound the “h” pretty loudly.

19. *These are they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.*

They know nothing of the divine Life and of that divine Spirit who dwells in the bodies of the saints as in a holy temple.

20. *But you, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.*

He has told us about the one Foundation, now he bids us build thereon —“Building up yourselves on your most holy faith.” “Praying.” That is the next thing. There is no preservation like that which is given by God in response to believing prayer. “Praying in the Holy Spirit.” There is a kind of praying which is without the Holy Spirit—and it speeds not. There is a praying which is the breath of God in man, returning from where it came—this will keep us from falling and bring us untold blessings

21. *Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*

While you thus carefully watch over yourselves, have great love, also, to others, and seek to bless them, especially your fellow Church members.

22. *And of some have compassion, making a difference.*

Some of those professors who are not living consistently with their profession, in whom you can see signs and tokens of sin, yet there may be some trace of repentance, some reason to hope that they will forsake the evil when they see it to be evil—"have compassion" upon them.

23. *And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.*

Loving the sinners, but hating their sin. When you have to deal with unclean professors, there must be an abhorrence and detestation of their sin even when there is great gentleness towards the sinner. We must never be such believers in the repentance of the guilty as to be willing to wink at sin, for sin is a great evil in any case and repentance cannot wipe it away. And though it behooves us to be tender to the sinner, we must never be tender to the sin.

24, 25. *Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.*

How beautifully this short and sad Epistle ends! Having described the many who, after making a profession, yet turn aside, Jude bursts out with this jubilant doxology!

REVELATION

Revelation 1

1, 2. *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.*

John was a most suitable person to see and to bear record of the Word of God, for in his gospel (John 19:35) he describes himself at the cross as both seeing and bearing record. So now that his once-crucified Lord is in his glory, it seemed meet that the same beloved disciple should both see him and bear record concerning him. No eyes were so fit to see the glory of Christ as those which had looked with so much love into the eyes of Jesus of Nazareth in the days of his humiliation. The head that had rested upon his Master's bosom at the supper table was prepared thereby for all the glory that should afterwards be revealed. The nearer your communion with Christ is, the more will you be permitted to know of him. Our perceptions of Christ, if they are true, will be spiritual; and in proportion as our spiritual life is in a right condition, shall we be able to know more and more of him.

3. *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.*

I do not perceive that John says, "Blessed are they that understand this Book," for, surely, they would be very few. I do not doubt that there are portions of Scripture which are not meant to be understood as yet—things concerning the future which are wrapped up in a phraseology which will be plain enough when that future arrives, but which for the present are not intended so much to gratify

our curiosity as to stimulate our watchfulness. To keep us constantly on the look-out, is the main object of every revelation concerning the future.

So far, then, we have the proem or preface of this great Book of the Revelation.

4. *John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace,*

John's benediction to the seven churches of Asia is like that of Paul when he is writing to a Christian church, "Grace be unto you, and peace." You have probably noticed that, when Paul is writing to a minister individually, his greeting is, "Grace, mercy, and peace;" for they who have the solemn charge of souls need "mercy" above all other men. May they find mercy of God in that day! But to the churches themselves, it is simply this double benediction, "Grace be unto you, and peace." These blessings, coming in their proper order, grace first, and peace afterwards, are very precious.

That peace which is not founded upon grace, and does not follow grace, is a false peace. "Grace be unto you, and peace." But if you have grace, peace ought to follow; you have a right to it, it is a logical sequence to the possession of the grace of God. Well does Dr. Watts sing—

"If sin be pardon'd, I'm secure;
Death hath no sting beside."

If grace be given, glory will follow. Wherefore, beloved, "Grace be unto you, and peace."

from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

And there are seven spirits which are before his throne. The Holy Ghost, in whatever way he operates in any of his divine works—in all these he is the Comforter, the source of grace and peace to us. You need not be afraid of the Holy Spirit, even though he be the Spirit of judgment and the Spirit of burning, for he will burn up nothing in us but what ought to be consumed, and will judge nothing but what ought to be judged and to be condemned.

5, 6. *And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.*

Peace may come to us from the seven spirits which are before the throne; but specially grace and peace from Jesus Christ as the Faithful Witness. Whatever he bears witness to, it is full of grace and peace to believers, and he himself is the first begotten from the dead. Oh! his resurrection! what a wondrous fountain of grace and peace that is to us! And then his divine sovereignty—his rule over all providence and nature, the Prince of the kings of the earth—what grace and peace may every one of you who love him find there! At the thought of this, the divine writer turns from his benediction to a doxology.

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Notice very specially that the exile of Patmos, having known much of Christ, and lived in his presence for many years, sings of love as manifested in the washing away of sins. Some years before, he had written, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that marvellous word, “God is love;” but now, as the end of his life approaches, all love seems for him to be summed up in the blood-washing. This is the climax and summit of the love of Christ.

He loved us, and then washed us: love is the fountainhead, the first source of blessing. Think of this as being a recognizable description of our Lord—“unto him that loved us.” John wanted to point out the Lord Jesus Christ, and all he said was, “Unto him that loved us.” He was sure nobody would make any mistake as to who was intended, for no one can be said to love us in comparison with Jesus.

John had hardly begun to deliver his message to the seven churches, he had hardly given in his name and stated from whom the message came, when he felt that he must lift up his heart in a joyful doxology. The very mention of the name of the Lord Jesus, “the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth,” fired his heart. He could not sit down coolly to write even what the Spirit of God dictated: he must rise; he must fall upon his knees; he must bless and magnify, and adore the Lord Jesus. This text is just the

upward burst of a great geyser of devotion.

7. *Behold, he cometh with clouds;*

As workmen are moved to be more diligent in service when they hear their master's footfall, so, doubtless, saints are quickened in their devotion when they are conscious that he whom they worship is drawing near. He has gone away to the Father for a while, and so he has left us alone in this world; but he has said, "I will come again and receive you unto myself," and we are confident that he will keep his word.

The clouds are the dust of his feet in that dread day of battle when he shall ease him of his adversaries, shaking them out of the earth with his thunder, and consuming them with the devouring flame of his lightning. All heaven shall gather with its utmost pomp to the great appearing of the Lord, and all the terrible grandeur of nature shall then be seen at its full. Not as the Man of sorrows, despised and rejected of men, shall Jesus come, but as Jehovah came upon Sinai in the midst of thick clouds and a terrible darkness, so shall he come, whose coming shall be the final judgment.

and every eye shall see him,

I will be a literal appearing, and an actual sight. If the second advent was to be a spiritual manifestation, to be perceived by the minds of men, the phraseology would be, "Every mind shall perceive him." But it is not so: we read, "Every eye shall see him."The same Christ who ate a piece of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb after he had risen from the dead; the same who said, "Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have"—this same Jesus, with a material body, is to come in the clouds of heaven. In the same manner as he went up he shall come down. He shall be literally seen.

and they also which pierced him,

In this is included all the company that nailed him to the tree, with those that took the spear and made the gash in his side; indeed, all that had a hand in his cruel crucifixion. It includes all of these, but it comprehends many more besides.

“They also who pierced him” are by no means a few.

Who have pierced him? Why those that once professed to love him, and have gone back to the world. Those that once ran well, “What did hinder them?” And now they use their tongues to speak against the Christ whom once they professed to love. They also have pierced him whose inconsistent lives have brought dishonor upon the sacred name of Jesus. They also have pierced him, who refused his love, stifled their consciences, and refused his rebukes.

and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.

They have crucified him; all kindreds of the earth have, alas! had a share in Christ’s death, and dying unforgiven, or being found alive at his coming without repentance, they “shall wail because of him.”

Even so, Amen.

Though the wicked shall wail at Christ’s appearing, the saints must give consent to the judgments of God as well as to his mercies: “Even so, Amen.”

8. *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*

Happy man that thus in reverent worship hears God speaking to him in answer to his voice to God.

9. *I John, who also am your brother,*

How sweetly this sounds. This is a man that has seen and heard God. This is a man who is full of visions, who has beheld the broken seals and the poured out vials; the man that is familiar with the infinite. “I, John, who also am your brother.”

And companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patches, for the word of

God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

That is a wondrous linking, is it not, in this verse?—"the kingdom and patience." You must have the cross and the crown together. We get the kingdom of Christ, but not without the passion of Christ. There is the cross marked on all the treasure trove that we find in Christ. It is not genuine if it is not marked with the cross. "The kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ."

10-13. *I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet. Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last:*

What evidence we have here of the divinity of Christ, for we shall see, as we read on, that it is Christ that is speaking here; and just now it was the Father which in much the same words said, "I am Alpha and Omega." We cannot always draw the line between the voice of God and the voice of the God-man, Christ Jesus, and we need not wish to do so, for Holy Scripture does not draw us up rigid, but it would have us believe it, all the same for that. Yet it is always accurate, always true, where it has shades of definition; for, after all, Christ is so truly God that whether it speak of him absolutely as God, or of him as God and man, Mediator, it matters little to us.

and, what thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergames, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me.

This was a very natural thing for John to do. We always feel a desire to see who it is that addresses us, and especially would this be the case if we heard such a sentence as this, spoken with a trumpet voice by One who could truly say it, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last." Who would not have turned to see such a Speaker? I am sure that John would, for he must have recognized that voice, though it was pitched in a higher key than usual, and was full of more sonorous force than when he last heard it. He must have known the voice of the Well-beloved as he spare again to his highly-favored servant.

12, 13. *And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;and in the midst of the seven candlesticks*

He is portrayed as standing in the midst of the golden candlesticks, by which we understand the churches. We love to know what he is to the nations, what he is to his peculiar people, the Jews, what he will be to his enemies, but it is best for us, as members of Christian churches, to know what he is in the churches.

one like unto the Son of man

It was the very same Son of man, but John could only say" like unto the Son of man,"—like unto the One whom he had known long before, and whom he had loved with undying affection—like him, but, oh! how unlike him, notwithstanding. The Christ in every position is still discernible as "like unto the Son of man." As John sees him, with his face shining like the sun in its strength, yet still he is "like unto the Son of man." In the manger, he was like to what he was afterwards upon the cross; on the cross, he was like to what he is now upon his throne; and when he comes again in all his glory, he will still be like unto what he was and always is—"the Son of man." "In the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man,"

Clothed with a garment down to the foot,

This was the robe constantly worn by kings the garment which descended, and left only the feet apparent. This was also the peculiar dress of the priest. A priest of the Jewish dispensation, had the long flowing white robe which reached down to the ground, and covered him entirely. Christ, then, in being thus clothed, asserts his kingship and his eternal priesthood.

and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

the main idea here is that of official dignity and position, and when you read of the golden girdle which was about the papa, it is a representation of how the high priest was girt. He was girt with a girdle that had gold in it. The girdles of the other priests were not of gold, but that of the high priest's was mainly made of that precious metal, and it was girt about the paps, not at the waist, but across the

breast, as if to show that the love of Christ, or the place where his loving heart beat most, was just the spot where he bound firmly about himself the garments of his official dignity, as if his love was the faithful girdle of his loins, as if the affection of his heart ever kept him fast and firm to the carrying out of all the offices which he had undertaken for us.

14. *His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow;*

When we see in the picture his head and his hair white as snow, we understand the antiquity of his reign. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” When all these things were not, when the old mountains had not lifted their hoary heads into the clouds, when the yet more hoary sea had never roared in tempest, ere the lamps of heaven had been kit, when God dwelt alone in his immensity, and the unnavigated waves of ether, if there were such, had never been fanned by wing of seraph, and the solemnity of silence had never been startled by the song of cherubim, Jesus was of old in eternity with God. We know how he was despised and rejected of men, but we understand, too, what he meant when he said, “Before Abraham was, I am.” We know how he who died when but a little more than thirty years of age, was verily the Father of the everlasting ages, having neither beginning of days nor end of years.

and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

This represents Christ’s oversight of his Church, As he is in the Church the Ancient of Eternal Days, her Everlasting Father, and her Head to be reverenced, so is he in the Church, the Universal Overseer, the great Bishop and Shepherd of souls. And what eyes he has! How penetrating! “Like flames of fire.” How discriminating!

“Like flames of fire,” which melt the dross and only leave the real metal, “like flames of fire,” he sees, not by light without, but his own eyes supply the light with which he sees. His knowledge of the Church is not derived from the Churches prayers, nor from her experience of her wants, nor from her verbal statements, he sees by no borrowed light of the sun, or of the moon, his eyes are lamps unto themselves. In the Church’s thick darkness, when she is trampled down, when no light shines upon her, he sees her, for his eyes are” like flames of

fire.”

15. *And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace;*

The head, you see, is reverent; the feet are blazing; the countenance is like the sun for glory; the feet like burning brass for trial. I think we may understand by this the Church of God on earth—those saints united to Christ who are the last of the body, the lower part who are in these times still treading the earth. Christ is in heaven, his head is like “the sun that shineth in his strength.” Christ is on earth in the midst of his Church, and where his feet walk among the golden candlesticks, they walk in fire, they are like brass that burns in a furnace.

and his voice as the sound of many waters.

Seas lashed to tempests, cataracts leaping from their stupendous heights—such was the voice of Christ.

16. *And he had in his right hand seven stars:*

The Church should always see Christ as holding up her ministers. Ministers are very much in danger. Stars, or those things that seem to be stars, may be but shooting stars, they may be but meteors and flash awhile right soon to melt away, but the ministers of Christ, though they be in danger, yet, if they be Christ’s ministers, are perfectly safe. He keeps the seven stars. The celestial Pleiades of the gospel are always in Christ’s hand; and who can pluck them thence?

and out of his mouth went a sharp two edged sword:

Now, as the gospel of Christ must be heard, because it is “the voice of many waters,” so it must be felt, for it is” a two edged sword;” and it is surprising how the gospel really is felt, too. It is felt by those who hate it; they writhe under it; they cannot sleep after it, they feel indignant, they are horrified, they are disgusted, and all that, but still there is a something within which does not let them remain quiet. That two edged sword gets at the marrow of their bones. They wish they had never heard the Word, though they can never, heal

themselves of the wound they have gotten by it. And to those who are blessed under the Word—what a two-edged sword it is to them! how it kills their self-righteousness! how it cuts the throat of their sins! how it lays their lusts dead at the feet of Jesus! how all-subduing is it in the son! No sword of Gideon was ever so potent against a horde of Midianites as the sword that cometh out of Jesus' lips against the hosts of our sins.

and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Go abroad and fix your eye upon the sun if you can, select the day of the year in which he is most in the zenith, and then fix your steady gaze upon him. Doth he not blind you, are you not overwhelmed? But mark, when you can gaze at that sun with undimned eye, you shall even then have no power to look upon the countenance of Christ.Well may the angels veil their faces with their wings, well may the elders offer vials full of odours sweet, that the smoke of their incense may be a medium through which they may see his face.

17. *And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead.*

He was not only brought to the posture of reverence, but he was so overawed that he became unconscious. It is the same person upon whose breast John had leaned his head, yet now he is represented as John had never seen him before. He was not so at the last supper; he was not so upon the cross; he was not so on the Mount of Transfiguration; he was not so even when he had risen from the dead, and, perhaps, he will not be so when we see him in his glory. This was a specially instructive representation of Christ, and it was too much even for the trained and educated spirit of John the Divine.

And he laid his right hand upon me,

It is noticeable, that in the great cures which our Savior wrought, he almost always touched the patient. He could with a word have healed, but to prove his fellowship with the sick, he put his hand upon the leper, and upon the blind eye, and touched the deaf ear; thus manifesting his condescending contact with the infirmities of our nature. The Master could have spoken a word to John, and have revived him; but he did not stand at a distance, or guard himself with a

“Touch me not” but, instead of that, he commenced his care with a touch. No other hand could have revived the apostle, but the hand which was pierced for him had matchless power.

saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

This language can be used of none but God himself; none but he is first; none but he is last; none but God can be first and last.Moreover, by the words “the first and the last” are signified, in most languages, the sum and substance of all things. And so Jesus Christ, in being first and last, is all in all. And, truly, it is so in the working of redemption and salvation; he begins, carries on, completes; he asks no creature help and will have none. To us he is the author and the finisher of our faith, the alpha of our first comfort, and the omega of our final bliss. We worship Christ as the sum and substance of all good.

18. *I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen;*

He who offered up the atonement lives again to claim the effect of his sacrifice. He has presented the meritorious sacrifice, and now he has gone to heaven to plead the sacrifice before the throne of God, and to lay claim to the place which he has prepared for them that love him. Thou hast no dead Savior to trust to: thou reliest in him who once died—this is comfort to thee, but he lives, the great Redeemer lives. He has risen from the tomb; he has climbed the hills of heaven; he sits at the right hand of the Father, prepared to defend his people. If thou hadst a Christ in the sepulcher that were sorrow upon sorrow; but thou hast a Christ in heaven, who can die no more. Be thou of good cheer.

and have the keys of hell and of death.

The mediatorial office which Christ now occupies is one of great power.The devil despite his malignity can do nothing but what Christ permits him. He is a chained enemy; he may rave and rage, but he cannot injure the child of God. And since Jesus who died and ever lives has the keys of death and hell at his girdle, we will not fear to die, let the time appointed be when it may. So that you see there was abundance of comfort for the sinking spirit of the apostle John.

19. *Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;*

Come, lay aside thy fears. Thy fears disqualify thee from holding the pen. Thou hast scarcely dared to look. I am sure thou wilt not date to write until I strengthen thee.

20. *The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks.*

Then he proceeds to explain what he meant, just after the manner of the Son of man who, when he pronounced a parable in public, opened it up to his own disciples in secret, even as he does still. Oh, how blessedly is “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever”! His characteristics never change what he was, he is, and that he ever will be, blessed be his holy name.”

The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

John was not so benighted as to understand any of this literally. He knew that the candlesticks were not meant for candlesticks, but for the seven light-giving Churches, that the stars were not stars, but ministers, and he understood right well, that all the whole description through, it was the symbol, and the spirit of the vision he was to look to, and not to the literal words.

Revelation 2

1. *Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;*

It was the work of the priest to go into the holy place and to trim the seven-branched lamp of gold: see how our Great High Priest walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: his work is not occasional, but constant. Wearing robes which are at once royal and priestly, he is seen lighting the holy lamps, pouring in the sacred oil, and removing impurities which would dim the light.

Hence our Lord's fitness to deal with the churches, which are these golden lamp-stands, for no one knows so much about the lamps as the person whose constant work it is to watch them and trim them. No one knows the churches as Jesus does, for the care of all the churches daily comes upon him, he continually walks among them, and holds their ministers as stars in his right hand. His eyes are perpetually upon the churches, so that he knows their works, their sufferings, and their sins; and those eyes are as a flame of fire, so that he sees with a penetration, discernment, and accuracy to which no other can attain.

With him is the oil to feed the living flame, and he knows how to pour it in according to due measure; with him are those golden snuffers with which to remove every superfluity of naughtiness, that our lights may so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven.

2. *I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience,*

Happy the man whose works are known and accepted of Christ. He is no idle Christian, he has practical godliness; he seeks by works of piety to obey God's

whole law, by works of charity to manifest his love to the brotherhood and by works of devotion to show his attachment to the cause of his Master. “I know thy works.”

But further, Christ said, “and thy labor.” This is more still. Many Christians have works but only few Christians have labor. There were many preachers in Whitfield’s day that had works, but Whitfield had labor. He toiled and travailed for souls. He was “in labors more abundant.” Many were they in the apostle’s days who did works for Christ; but pre-eminently the apostle Paul did labor for souls. It is not work merely, it is anxious work, it is casting forth the whole strength, and exercising all the energies for Christ.

But further, Christ says “I know thy patience.” Now there be some that labor, and they do it well. But what does hinder them? They only labor for a little season, and then they cease to work and begin to faint. But this church had labored on for many years; it had thrown out all its energies—not in some spasmodic effort, but in a continual strain and unabated zeal for the glory of God. “I know thy patience.”

and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

The thorough hatred which the church had of evil doctrine, of evil practice, and its corresponding intense love for pure truth and pure practice—in that I trust some of us can bear a part. “And thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.” Here, too, I think some of us may hope to be clear. The husks, the bran, and the chaff, are not things that we can feed upon. And when we listen to those who preach another gospel, a holy anger burns within us, for we love the truth as it is in Jesus; and nothing but that will satisfy us.

3. *And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.*

They had borne persecutions, difficulties, hardships, embarrassments, and discouragements, yet had they never flagged, but always continued faithful.

4. *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

Persecution upon persecution visited the faithful, but they bore it all with holy courage and constancy, and continued still confessing their Lord. This was good, and the Lord highly approved it; but yet underneath it he saw the tokens of decline; they had left their first love. So there may seem to be all the patient endurance and dauntless courage that there should be, and yet as a fair apple may have a worm at its core, so may it be with the church when it looks best to the eye of friends.

It is idle for the wife to say that she is obedient, and so forth: if love to her husband has evaporated, her wifely duty cannot be fulfilled, she has lost the very life and soul of the marriage state. So this is a most important matter, our love to Christ, because it touches the very heart of that communion with him which is the crown and essence of our spiritual life. As a church we must love Jesus, or else we have lost our reason for existence. A church has no reason for being a church when she has no love within her heart, or when that love grows cold. Have I not often reminded you that almost any disease may be hopefully endured except disease of the heart? But when our sickness is a disease of the heart, it is full of danger; and it was so in this case: “Thou hast left thy first love.” It is a disease of the heart, a central, fatal disease, unless the great Physician shall interpose to stay its progress, and to deliver us from it.

5. *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works;*

There must be in every declining Christian a practical repentance. Do not be satisfied with regrets and resolves. Do the first works; do not strain after the first emotions, but do the first works. No renewal is so valuable as the practical cleansing of our way. If the life be made right, it will prove that the love is so. In doing the first works you will prove that you have come back to your first love. The prescription is complete, because the doing of the first works is meant to include the feeling of the first feelings, the sighing of the first sighs, the enjoying of the first joys: these are all supposed to accompany returning obedience and activity.

We are to act back to these first works at once. Most men come to Christ with a leap; and I have observed that many who come back to him usually do so at a bound. The slow revival of one's love is almost an impossibility; as well expect the dead to rise by degrees. Love to Christ is often love at first sight: we see him, and are conquered by him. If we grow cold, the best thing we can do is to fasten our eyes on him till we cry, "My soul melted while my Beloved spake." It is a happy circumstance if I can cry, "Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib." How sweet for the Lord to put us back again at once into the old place, back again in a moment!

or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

If the Lord be withdrawn, we can go on with our work as we used to do, but nothing will come of it: we can go on with Sunday-schools, mission-stations, branch churches, and yet accomplish nothing. Brethren, we can go on with the Orphanage, the College, the Colportage, the Evangelistic Society, the Book Fund, and all else, and yet nothing will be effected if the arm of the Lord be not made bare.

He can, if he wills, even take away from the church her very existence as a church. Ephesus is gone: nothing but ruins can be found. Rome once held a noble church of Christ, but has not her name become the symbol of antichrist? The Lord can soon take away candlesticks out of their places if the church uses her light for her own glory, and is not filled with his love.

6. *But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

This was grand of them: it showed a backbone of truth. I wish some of the churches of this age had a little of this holy decision about them; for nowadays, if a man be clever; he may preach the vilest lie that was ever vomited from the mouth of hell, and it will go down with some. He may assail every doctrine of the gospel, he may blaspheme the Holy Trinity, he may trample on the blood of the Son of God, and yet nothing shall be said about it if he be held in repute as a man of advanced thought and liberal ideas. The church at Ephesus was not of this mind. She was strong in her convictions; she could not yield the faith, nor

play the traitor to her Lord.

7. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*

You must fight your way back to the garden of the Lord. You will have to fight against lethargy, against an evil heart of unbelief, against the benumbing influence of the world. In the name and power of him who bids you repent, you must wrestle and struggle till you get the mastery over self, and yield your whole nature to your Lord.

In contrast to the fall which took place in the paradise of God, we have man eating of the tree of life, and so living for ever. If we, through grace, overcome the common tendency to decline in love, then shall we be confirmed and settled in the favor of the Lord. By eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil we fell; by eating of the fruit of a better tree we live and stand fast for ever.

8, 9. *And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.*

The church of God and the synagogue of Satan both exist. We see an Abel and a Cain, an Isaac and an Ishmael, a Jacob and an Esau; those that are born after the flesh, being the children of their father the devil, for his works they do, but those that are born again—being born after the Spirit, after the power of the life of Christ, are thus in Christ Jesus

10, 11. *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of*

the second death.

The first death we must endure unless the Lord should suddenly come to His temple. For this let us abide in readiness, awaiting it without fear, since Jesus has transformed death from a dreary cavern into a passage leading to glory.

The thing to be feared is not the first but the second death, not the parting of the soul from the body but the final separation of the entire man from God. This is death indeed. This death kills all peace, joy, happiness, hope. When God is gone, all is gone. Such a death is far worse than ceasing to be: it is existence without the life which makes existence worth the having.

Now, if by God's grace we fight on to the end and conquer in the glorious war, no second death can lay its chill finger upon us, We shall have no fear of death and hell, for we shall receive a crown of life which fadeth not away. How this nerves us for the fight! Eternal life is worth a life's battle. To escape the hurt of the second death is a thing worth struggling for throughout a lifetime.

12. *And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;*

Does the Lord Jesus come to his church in that way? Does he at the door of the church bear a sword? a sword unscabbarded? a sharp sword? a sharp sword with two edges? Yes, even to his visible church this is how our Lord Jesus Christ appears. To his own spiritual and faithful ones he is to each one a husband, full of unutterable tenderness and love; but to the visible church, which at its best estate is never altogether pure, he appears in severer form. To a church he comes as Captain of the Lord’s host, and he wields a sharp sword with two edges. It is the parallel of that passage where John the Baptist saith of him: “His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and he will gather his wheat into his garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” That winnowing fan is never out of his hand, for it is always needed. Even though our Lord is full of grace, he is also full of truth. His love to his servants manifests itself in a burning jealousy which will not endure evil.

13. *I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is:*

Probably there were horrible idolatries, with obscene orgies in the city, or it may have been a place of peculiar licentiousness, or of special persecution. We cannot at this distance of time exactly tell what it was; but the Lord regarded it as the citadel of Satan. There are places in the world at this day where sin has so much the upper hand, or where error and unbelief reign so supreme, that the devil would seem to have there taken up his residence, and to have made it his capital city. This is a trying neighborhood for a church of Christ, and yet it is the place where it is most wanted.

and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

We must confess the faith at all proper times and seasons, and we must never hide our colors. There are times when we must dash to the front and court the encounter, when we see that our Captain's honor demands it. Let us never be either ashamed or afraid. Our Lord Jesus deserves that we should yield ourselves as willing sacrifices in defense of his faith. Ease, reputation, life itself, must go for the name and faith of Jesus. If in the heat of the battle our good name or our life must be risked to win the victory, then let us say, "In this battle some of us must fall; why should not I? I will take part and lot with my Master, and bear reproach for his sake." Only brave soldiers are worthy of our great Lord. Those who sneak into the rear, that they may be comfortable, are not worthy of the kingdom. What will our Captain say of cowards in that day when he distributes rewards to all faithful ones?

14-17. *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a*

new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Today we eat of heavenly food which falls about our camps; the food of the wilderness, the food which comes from heaven, the food which never fails the pilgrims to Canaan. But there is reserved for us in Christ Jesus a still higher degree of spiritual life and a food for it which, as yet, is hidden from our experience. In the golden pot which was laid up in the ark there was a portion of manna hidden away, which though kept for ages never grew stale. No one ever saw it; it was hid with the Ark of the Covenant, in the Holy of Holies. Even so, the highest life of the believer is hid with Christ, in God. We shall come to it soon, Being made victorious through the grace of our Lord Jesus, we shall eat of the King's meat and feed upon royal dainties. We shall feed upon Jesus. He is our "hidden manna," as well as the manna of the wilderness. He is all in all to us in our highest, as well as in our lowest, estate. He helps us to fight, gives us the victory, and then is Himself our reward.

18, 19. *And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works;*

The Lord Jesus Christ never removes his eyes from his Church. He notes everything that concerns her, observing not merely the life of her members but their soul's health, and not merely their health, but the way in which they spend their spiritual strength. He knows their works, he observes their charity, their patience, their zeal, for his name's sake. Seven times in his words to the churches, he says, "I know thy works." This should make us live with great care, for albeit the whole world is under the eye of God, yet of his Church it is true, "upon one stone there shall he seven eyes." The full perfection of omniscience exerts itself upon the Lord's chosen people. The husbandman has an eye to all his estate, but his chief care is his own family; and, even so, while the Great Husbandman of all creation observes all his works, he chiefly looks upon his own household. "The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy."

and the last to be more than the first.

Brace yourself up, O weary, working brother, for your day's work is not over yet, and your sun cannot go down till, like Joshua, you have finished your conflict with Amalek. The old saying is true, "You are immortal till your work is done." Possibly not one half of your work is even begun, and therefore you will rise again from sickness, you will soar above depression, and you will do more for the Lord than ever. It will yet be said to you, as to the angel of the church in Thyatira, "I know thy works, and the last to be more than the first."

20-23. *Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.*

Very likely Lydia became the herald of the gospel in her native place. Let the women who know the truth proclaim it; for why should their influence be lost? "The Lord giveth the word; the women that publish the tidings are a great host." Woman can be as powerful for evil as for good: we see it in this very church of Thyatira, where the woman Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess, sought to seduce many from the truth. Seeing, then, that the devil employs women in his service, let those women whom God has called by his grace be doubly earnest in seeking to prevent or undo the mischief that others of their sex are working. If not called to public service, all have the home-sphere wherein they can shed forth the aroma of a godly life and testimony.

24-29. *But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a*

potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

I cannot read the Scriptures without perceiving that there is to be a millennial reign, as I believe, upon the earth, and that there shall he new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Well, whatever that reign is to be, we shall reign also. “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father.”

Revelation 3

1. *And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.*

The first charge of general defilement he brings against the church in Sardis was that they had a vast deal of open profession, and but little of sincere religion. “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.”

That is the crying sin of the present age. Take our churches at large—there is no lack of names, but there is a lack of life. Else, how is it that our prayer-meetings are so badly attended? Where is the zeal or the energy shown by the apostles? Where is the Spirit of the living God? Is he not departed? Might not “Ichabod” be written on the walls of many a sanctuary? They have a name to live, but are dead. They have their societies, their organisms; but where is the life of godliness? Where is inward piety? Where is sincere religion? Where is practical godliness? Where is firm, decisive, puritanical piety? Thank God, there are a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments, but charity itself will not allow us to say that the church generally possesses the Spirit of God.

2. *Be watchful,*

He looked on the church and saw the bishops slumbering, the elders slumbering, and the people slumbering; they were not, as once they were, watchful for the faith, striving together and earnestly contending for it, not wrestling against the enemy of souls, laboring to spread their Master’s kingdom, but the apostle saw sleepiness, coldness, lethargy; therefore he said, “Be watchful.” Oh! John, if from thy grave thou couldst start up, and see the church as thou didst at Sardis, having thine eyes anointed by the Spirit, thou wouldst say it is even so now. Ah! we have abundance of cold, calculating Christians, multitudes of professors, but

where are the zealous ones? where are the leaders of the children of God? where are your heroes who stand in the day of battle? where are your men who “count not their lives dear unto them,” that they might win Christ, and be found in him? where are those who have an impassioned love for souls? How many of our pulpits are filled by earnest, enthusiastic preachers? Alas! look, at the church. She has builded herself fine palaces, imitating popery, she hath girded herself with vestments; she has gone astray from her simplicity; but she has lost the fire and the life which she once had.

and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

I take it that this may relate to the poor feeble saints, the true children of God, who were sorrowing, mourning, and groaning in their midst, who were so oppressed with sorrow on account of the state of Sardis, that they were “ready to die.”

3, 4. *Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments;*

Only a few; not so few as some think, but not as many as others imagine! A few compared with the mass of professors; a few compared even with the true children of God, for many of them have defiled their garments. They were but a few, and those few were even in Sardis. There is not a church on earth that is so corrupt but has “a few.” You who are always fighting so much far your denomination, you think other denominations are Sardis; but there are a few even in Sardis. Even if the denomination is the worst of all Protestant sections, there are a few in Sardis; and perhaps that is as much as we can say of our denomination: so we will treat them all alike. There are a few in Sardis—mark that.

and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

Communion with Christ on earth shall be the special reward of those who have not defiled their garments. Nothing is such a father of doubts as sin; sin is the very mother of our distress. He who is covered with sin must not expect to enjoy full assurance, but he who liveth close to his God, and keeps his garments unspotted from the world—he shall walk in white, knowing that his adoption is sure.

But chiefly we should understand this to refer to justification. “They shall walk in white;” that is, they shall enjoy a constant sense of their own justification by faith; they shall understand that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to them, that they have

“A matchless robe which far exceeds
What earthly princes wear;”

that they have been washed and made whiter than snow, and purified and made more cleanly than wool.

Again, it refers to joy and gladness: for white robes were holiday dresses among the Jews. They that have not defiled their garments, shall have their faces always bright; they shall understand what Solomon means when he said, “Go thy way eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart. Let thy garments be always white, for God hath accepted thy works.” He who is accepted of God shall wear white garments, being received by the Father-garments of joy and gladness. Whence so many doubts, so much distress, and misery, and mourning? It is because the church has defiled her garments; they do not here below walk in white, because they are not worthy.

5, 6. *He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

Those who have not defiled their garments here, shall most certainly walk in white up yonder, where the white-robed hosts sing perpetual hallelujahs to the Most High. If thou hast not defiled thy garments, thou mayest say, “I know whom I have believed,” and thou mayest cry, “when this earthly house of my tabernacle is dissolved, I know I have a mansion of God, a house not made with

hands, eternal in the heavens;" not for my works, not by way of merit, but as the reward of grace. If there be joys inconceivable, happiness beyond a dream, bliss which imagination knoweth not, blessedness which even the stretch of desire hath not reached, thou shalt have all these: thou shalt walk in white, since thou art worthy. Christ shall say to thee, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

7. *And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;*

Jesus is the keeper of the gates of paradise and before every believing soul He setteth an open door, which no man or devil shall be able to close against it. What joy it will be to find that faith in Him is the golden key to the everlasting doors. The great King has made a banquet, and He has proclaimed to all the world that none shall enter but those who bring with them the fairest flower that blooms. The spirits of men advance to the gate by thousands, and they bring each one the flower which he esteems the queen of the garden; but in crowds they are driven from the royal presence, and enter not into the festive halls. Some bear in their hand the deadly nightshade of superstition, or the flaunting poppies of Rome, or the hemlock of self- righteousness, but these are not dear to the King, the bearers are shut out of the pearly gates.

8. *I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.*

The Philadelphian church was not great, but it was good; it was not powerful, but it was faithful. The Spirit says, "Thou hast a little strength." Every band of believers has some strength: weak as we are in ourselves, the very fact of our possessing faith proves that we have a portion of strength. Still that strength is a matter of degrees; and certain churches have a little strength—but only a little. I suppose that the Philadelphian church had but little strength in the following respects—the number of its members would be small, and it had therefore but little strength for undertaking any extensive enterprize which would call for numerous bands of workers. They had also little strength in the direction of

talent. They were not like that famous church at Corinth, where everybody could teach everybody, but where nobody cared to learn of any one. They had but small ability to speak with tongues, or work miracles, or teach the word; but they adhered faithfully to what they had been taught by the apostles of the Lord: they were not brilliant, but they were sound. Churches with few men of learning or eloquence in them may yet be greatly approved of the Lord, who cares more for grace than learning, more for faith than talent.

In all probability they were, like most of the churches of that day, possessed of very little pecuniary strength. They could do but little where money would be required. They were a company of poor people with no man of means among them; and there are many such churches that are peculiarly precious to the heart of God, who cares nothing for gold, and everything for sincerity. Possibly they were little, too, in those things which go side by side with grace: I mean in knowledge, and in power to utter what they knew. This was a pity; but as it was their misfortune and not their fault, they were not blamed for it. The Lord does not blame us for having little strength, but for having little love, little faith, little zeal, little consecration.

The Philadelphian saints, like the limpet, which has but little strength, stuck firmly to the rock, and they are commended for it. They had little strength, but they kept God's word, and they did not deny his name.

9, 10. *Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*

Those who keep God's word, shall themselves be kept from temptation. The Lord returns into his servants' bosoms that which they render to him: he gives keeping for keeping. The deliberately-formed conviction that the word of God is the standard of our faith, and the unwavering habit of referring everything to it and standing and falling by it, may not deliver us from every error, but they will save us from that which is the nurse and matrix of every error—that is, the habit of trusting to our own understanding, or relying upon the understandings of our

fellow-men.

11. *Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

It is a great thing to have done so well as to have a crown; it is a greater thing to hold it fast. Men of the world tell us that it takes much wit and industry to make a fortune; but that it is far more difficult to keep it when it is made: I am sure that in spiritual things it is so. For a church to be thoroughly prosperous in the life and work of God is difficult enough; but to continue so—this is the work, this is the labor.

12, 13. *Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

Quit yourselves like men, and keep his testimonies in the teeth of an infidel world and a philosophizing church. Hold you to the fundamentals of the faith, though with others the foundations are shaken. Abide like rocks in the midst of foaming billows, and defy all opposition. Stand fast in the house of your God below, and this shall be your reward above—"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out."

14. *And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;*

The word AMEN solemnly confirms that which went before; and Jesus is the great Confirmer; immutable, for ever is "the Amen" in all His promises. Sinner, I would comfort thee with this reflection. Jesus Christ said, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If you come to Him, He will say "Amen" in your soul; His promise shall be true to you. He said in the

days of His flesh, “The bruised reed I will not break.” O thou poor, broken, bruised heart, if thou comest to Him, He will say “Amen” to thee, and that shall be true in thy soul as in hundreds of cases in bygone years. Christian, is not this very comforting to thee also, that there is not a word which has gone out of the Saviour’s lips which He has ever retracted? The words of Jesus shall stand when heaven and earth shall pass away. If thou gettest a hold of but half a promise, thou shalt find it true. Beware of him who is called “Clip-promise,” who will destroy much of the comfort of God’s word.

15. *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.*

The address of our Lord begins, “I know thy works,” as much as to say, “Nobody else knows you. Men think better of you than you deserve. You do not know yourselves, you think your works to be excellent, but I know them to be very different.” Jesus views with searching eyes all the works of his church. The public can only read reports, but Jesus sees for himself. He knows what is done, and how it is done, and why it is done. He judges a church not merely by her external activities, but by her internal pieties; he searches the heart, and tries the reins of the children of men. He is not deceived by glitter, he tests all things, and values only that gold which will endure the fire. Our opinion of ourselves and Christ’s opinion of us may be very different, and it is a very sad thing when it is so.

I should judge that the church at Laodicea was once in a very fervent and healthy condition. Paul wrote a letter to it which did not claim inspiration, and therefore its loss does not render the Scriptures incomplete, for Paul may have written scores of other letters besides. Paul also mentions the church at Laodicea in his letter to the church at Colosse; he was, therefore, well acquainted with it, and as he does not utter a word of censure with regard to it, we may infer that the church was at that time in a sound state.

In process of time it degenerated, and cooling down from its former ardor it became careless, lax, and indifferent. Perhaps its best men were dead, perhaps its wealth seduced it into worldliness, possibly its freedom from persecution engendered carnal ease, or neglect of prayer made it gradually backslide; but in any case it declined till it was neither cold nor hot.

16. *So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*

They were not cold, but they were not hot; they were not infidels, yet they were not earnest believers; they did not oppose the gospel, neither did they defend it; they were not working mischief, neither were they doing any great good; they were not disreputable in moral character, but they were not distinguished for holiness; they were not irreligious, but they were not enthusiastic in piety nor eminent for zeal: they were what the world calls “Moderates,” they were of the Broad-church school, they were neither bigots nor Puritans, they were prudent and avoided fanaticism, respectable and averse to excitement.

Christ puts it, “I will spue thee out of my mouth,”—as disgusting him, and causing him nausea. Then the church must first be in his mouth, or else it could not be speed from it. What does this mean?Churches are in Christ’s mouth in several ways, they are used by him as his testimony to the world, he speaks to the world through their lives and ministries. He does as good as say, “O sinners, if ye would see what my religion can do, see here a godly people banded together in my fear and love, walking in peace and holiness.” He speaks powerfully by them, and makes the world see and know that there is a true power in the gospel of the grace of God. But when the church becomes neither cold nor hot he does not speak by her, she is no witness for him. When God is with a church the minister’s words come out of Christ’s mouth. “Out of his mouth went a two-edged sword,” says John in the Revelation, and that “two-edged sword” is the gospel which we preach.

When God is with a people they speak with divine power to the world, but it we grow lukewarm Christ says, “Their teachers shall not profit, for I have not sent them, neither am I with them. Their word shall be as water spilt on the ground, or as the whistling of the wind.” This is a dreadful thing. Better far for me to die than to be spued out of Christ’s mouth.

17. *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:*

In this state of the church there is much self-glorification, for Laodicea said, “I

am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." The members say, "Everything goes on well, what more do we want? All is right with us." This makes such a condition very hopeless, because reproofs and rebukes fall without power, where the party rebuked can reply, "We do not deserve your censures, such warnings are not meant for us." If you stand up in the pulpit and talk to sleepy churches, as I pretty frequently do, and speak very plainly, they often have the honesty to say, "There is a good deal of truth in what the man has said:" but if I speak to another church, which really is half asleep, but which thinks itself to be quite a model of diligence, then the rebuke glides off like oil down a slab of marble, and no result comes of it. Men are less likely to repent when they are in the middle passage between hot and cold, than if they were in the worst extremes of sin.

18. *I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich;*

Does not that strike you as being very like the passage in Isaiah, "Come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price"? It is so, and it teaches us that one remedy for lukewarmness is to begin again just as we began at first. We were at a high temperature at our first conversion. What joy, what peace, what delight, what comfort, what enthusiasm we had when first we knew the Lord! We bought gold of him then for nothing, let us go and buy again at the same price.

and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear;

Come, let us begin again, each one of us, inasmuch as we may have thought we were clothed and yet we were naked, let us hasten to him again, and at his own price, which is no price, procure the robe which he has wrought of his own righteousness, and that goodly raiment of his Spirit, which will clothe us with the beauty of the Lord.

and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

If, moreover, we have come to be rather dim in the eye, and no longer look up to

God and see his face, and have no bright vision of the glory to be revealed, and cannot look on sinners with weeping eyes, as we once did, let us go to Jesus for the eye-salve, just as we went when we were stone blind at first, and the Lord will open our eyes again, and we shall behold him in clear vision as in days gone by.

19. *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.*

Christ will have his favored church walk with great care, and if she will not follow him fully by being shown wherein she has erred, and will not repent when kindly counselled, he then betakes himself to some sharper means.

20. *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock:*

That is not the position which our Lord occupies in reference to a truly flourishing church. If we are walking aright with him, he is in the midst of the church, dwelling there, and revealing himself to his people. His presence makes our worship to be full of spirituality and life; he meets his servants at the table, and there spreads them a feast upon his body and his blood; it is he who puts power and energy into all our church-action, and causes the word to sound out from our midst.

There is Christ outside the church, driven there by her unkindness, but he has not gone far away, he loves his church too much to leave her altogether, he longs to come back, and therefore he waits at the doorpost. He knows that the church will never be restored till he comes back, and he desires to bless her, and so he stands waiting, knocking and knocking again and again; he does not merely knock once, but he stands knocking by earnest sermons, by providences, by impressions upon the conscience, by the quickenings of his Holy Spirit; and while he knocks he speaks, he uses all means to awaken his church.

Most condescendingly and graciously does he do this, for having threatened to spue her out of his mouth, he might have said, “I will get me gone; and I will never come back again to thee,” that would have been natural and just; but how gracious he is when, having expressed his disgust he says, “Disgusted as I am with your condition, I do not wish to leave you; I have taken my presence from

you, but I love you, and therefore I knock at your door, and wish to be received into your heart. I will not force myself upon you, I want you voluntarily to open the door to me."

if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

He will give us a rich feast, for he himself is the daintiest and most plenteous of all feasts for perishing souls. He will come and sup with us, that is, we shall be the host and entertain him: but then he adds, "and he with me," that is, he will be the host and entertain us. So we will change places; he will be host and guest by turns. We will give him of our best, but poor fare is that, too poor for him, and yet he will partake of it. Then he shall be host, and we will be guest, and oh, how we will feast on what he gives!

21, 22. *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

It is the throne of God, and Christ occupies it with his Father; but not alone, for he shares it with all his people. What a wonderful partnership is this! Christ gives us his life, his Father, his kingdom, and his throne, as part and parcel of the joint-stock company he shares with us.

To be defeated in the battle of life would prove that we did not belong to that conquering seed which, if its heel be bruised, shall nevertheless break the foeman's head. Fix it, then, in your minds that evil is to be overcome; it is a matter of necessity that we wage this war and succeed in it. We must needs triumph over the powers of darkness.

Revelation 4

1. *After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.*

It is very little that we can know of the future state, but we may be quite sure that we know as much as is good for us. We ought to be as content with that which is not revealed as with that which is. If God wills us not to know, we ought to be satisfied not to know. Depend on it, he has told us all about heaven that is necessary to bring us there; and if he had revealed more, it would have served rather for the gratification of our curiosity than for the increase of our grace.

2, 3. *And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne,*

"There was a rainbow round about the throne"—as though the rainbow hedged the throne, belted it, girt it round about. God's sovereignty must, of necessity, be absolute and unlimited. He made everything, and as nothing existed before God, or independent of God, he had a right to make what he pleased, and to make all that he did make just after his own will and pleasure. But as one truth is always to be taken in its relation to another truth, and not to be isolated from its natural kindred, it is a delightful consideration that God, in his absolute sovereignty never does violence to any of his other attributes, and, above all, never does violence to the covenant. The covenant still surrounds the sovereignty, and practically hedges it within its bounds.

God has the symbol of the covenant all round his throne. He cannot look anywhere without looking through his covenant. He sees us, he sees the world, he sees all things through that rainbow which is round about the throne. He sees all human affairs through the medium of the great Mediator, the Covenant Angel, the Lord Jesus.

in sight like unto an emerald.

The emerald, with its color green, is always taken to represent this green earth and the things which concern the dwellers therein, and it has always been viewed as a type of mercy. It is a soft and gentle color, the most agreeable to the eye of all the colors, the vibrations of light caused by it being found to be more suitable to the optic nerve than the vibrations of any other color. Scarlet, and such bright colors, the emblems of justice and vengeance, would soon destroy the eye; and white the emblem of purity, cannot long be endured. Those of us who have crossed lofty mountains covered with snow have had to suffer as long as we have been there from snow-blindness. The human eye would soon cease to perform its functions if the earth were long covered with snow and if we had nothing to relieve the eye. Green is the color that suits mankind, and it represents the mercy, the tenderness, and the benevolence of God towards mankind.

4. *And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting,*

The saints in heaven are represented as “elders,” which we take to refer not merely to the office of the eldership, as it is exercised among us, although it seems most fitting that the officers should be the representatives of the whole body, but the reference is rather to the fullness of growth of believers before the throne.

The universe of God is one; heaven and earth are not so separate as unbelief has dreamed. As the Lord hath but one family, written in one register, redeemed with one blood, quickened by one Spirit, so this whole household abides in one habitation evermore. We who are in the body abide in the lower room which is sometimes dark and cold, but bears sufficient marks that it is a room in God’s house; for it is to the eye of our faith often lit up with heavenly lustre, and we, even we, while we are yet here, are by blessed earnests made partakers of the

inheritance of the saints in light. It is the same house, I say, but ours is the lower room, while our glorified brethren are up there, in the upper story, where the sunlight streams in everlastingly, where no chilling winds or poisonous breath can ever reach.

clothed in white raiment;

Not in raiment of party-colors, whereon there were some spots, and yet some signs of whiteness. They are without fault before the throne of God; they have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," and the Spirit of God also has so thoroughly renewed them, that they are "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing;" they have been presented holy and unblamable before the throne of God.

and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

They reigned with Christ. He was a king, and he made them kings with him. As in the old Persian court the princes of the blood wore crowns, so in the court of heaven the princes of the blood, the brethren of the Lord, are crowned too. They are royal senators, they sit upon thrones, even as he has overcome, and sits down with his Father on his throne. These thrones they have to show their dominion, their rights and jurisdiction.

5-7. *And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.*

I should not like to dogmatize upon the meaning of the four living creatures; but still they do seem to me to be an emblem of the Church in its Godward standing, quickened by the life of God.

8-10. *And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne,*

They are kings, but yet they fall down—they wear royal crowns, but yet they prostrate themselves. They are second to none in God's universe; they stand as first in the peerage of creation; yet before the king they have no honor and no esteem, but as if they were slaves and menials, they cast themselves upon their faces before his throne, having nothing of their own whereof to glory, but boasting alone in Him. The more holy, the more humble. Where holiness is in perfection, there humility is in perfection too. The cherubim veil their faces with their wings, while they cry, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabbaoth." So do these elders, taking the same posture of humility, they bow before the throne.

and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

They know where they got them from, and they know to whom to ascribe the praise. Their crowns are their own, and, therefore, they wear them on their heads; their crowns were Jesu's gift, and, therefore, they cast them at his feet. They wear their crown, for he hath made them kings, and they cannot refuse the dignity; but they cast the crown at his feet, for they are only kings by right received from him, and acknowledge him thus to be King of kings and Lord of lords. It was a custom, you know, in imperial Rome, for those kings who held dominion under the emperor, on certain occasions to take off their crowns and lay them down before the emperor, so that when he bade them put them on again, they had fully recognised that their rights of kingship flowed only through him. So do they who are before the throne. With what rapture, with what joy, with what delight, do they cast their crowns there! To think they have a crown, and a crown to cast before him!

11. *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were*

created.

If you make a thing, you do so in order that it may serve a certain end; there is some object which you have in view, and if it does not answer your purpose, you put it aside, for you feel that it is a failure. Why, you would not keep a horse if it did not labor for you! You would not even let a dog live in your house if it did not fawn upon you, or in some way recognize that it ought to love and serve you. And when God made us men, he intended that we should serve him, he meant that we should find our happiness in doing his will; and he has so formed us that, if we do not glorify him, we do not really enjoy life. If we are not holy, we are not happy.

Revelation 5

1-4. *And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.*

The tears of John which were his liquid prayers, were, as far as he was concerned, the sacred keys by which the folded book was opened. If the heart can weep over a doctrine, it will get that doctrine opened up before long. There is no chemical so strong as our tears for piercing through the hard shell of truth. Sincerely cry over the truth, and soon the truth will enter your soul, and you will know its inmost meaning.

5. *And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not:*

Depend upon it that elder had been occupied in visiting the sick when he was on earth; and often when he had gone into their cottages and found them sorrowing, he had said unto them, “Weep not;” and the good man had not lost his character when he went to heaven, although it had been spiritualized and perfected; and seeing John weeping, he said to him, “Weep not.” Ah! those saints before the throne, if there were mourners there, would comfort them, I know; and if they could be sent down here to visit any of the sorrowing children of God, they would be too glad to do it.

behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed

to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

What was asked for was worthiness, not only in the sense of holiness, but in the sense of valor. One is reminded of a legend of the Crusades. A goodly castle and estate awaited the coming of the lawful heir: he and he only could sound the horn which hung at the castle gate; but he who could make it yield a blast would be one who had slain a heap of Paynim in the fight, and had come home victorious from many a bloody fray. So here, no man in earth or heaven had valor and renown enough to be worthy to take the mystic roll out of the hand of the Eternal. Our champion was worthy. What battles he had fought! What feats of prowess he had performed! He had overthrown sin; he had met face to face the Prince of darkness, and had overcome him in the wilderness; ay, he had conquered death, had bearded that lion in his den; had entered the dungeon of the sepulcher, and had torn its bars away. Thus he was worthy, in the sense of valor, on returning from the far country to be owned as the Father's glorious Son, heaven's hero, and so to take the book and loose the seals thereof.

6. *And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain,*

Why should our exalted Lord appear in His wounds in glory? The wounds of Jesus are His glories, His jewels, His sacred ornaments. To the eye of the believer, Jesus is passing fair because He is "white and ruddy" white with innocence, and ruddy with His own blood. We see Him as the lily of matchless purity, and as the rose crimsoned with His own gore. Christ is lovely upon Olivet and Tabor, and by the sea, but oh! there never was such a matchless Christ as He that did hang upon the cross. There we beheld all His beauties in perfection, all His attributes developed, all His love drawn out, all His character expressed. Beloved, the wounds of Jesus are far more fair in our eyes than all the splendour and pomp of kings. The thorny crown is more than an imperial diadem. It is true that He bears not now the sceptre of reed, but there was a glory in it that never flashed from sceptre of gold. Jesus wears the appearance of a slain Lamb as His court dress in which He wooed our souls, and redeemed them by His complete atonement. Nor are these only the ornaments of Christ: they are the trophies of His love and of His victory. He has divided the spoil with the strong. He has redeemed for Himself a great multitude whom no man can number, and these

scars are the memorials of the fight. Ah! if Christ thus loves to retain the thought of His sufferings for His people, how precious should his wounds be to us!

having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

He is the prophet of God. He it was that had the seven eyes to see all things and discern all mysteries; he it is that opened the seven seals, and thus unfolded the parts of the Book one after another, not merely that they might be read, but might be actually fulfilled; and yet he had been our substitute. Jesus explains everything: the Lamb is the open sesame of every secret. Nothing was ever a secret to him.

7. *And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.*

He was at home there: he counted it not robbery to be equal with God. He is "very God of very God"; to be extolled with equal honor with that which is given unto the Lord God Almighty. He advances to the throne, he takes the book, he communes with Jehovah, he accepts the divine challenge of love, and unseals the mysterious purposes of his glorious Father. To him there is no danger in a close approach to the infinite glory, for that glory is his own.

8. *And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.*

The idea conveyed to us, by "golden vials," is as far removed from the meaning of the Greek word as well could be, for a vial is to us generally a deep but narrow vessel, but the vessel here meant is both shallow and broad. A better rendering would be "golden bowls," or "golden goblets full of odours" or "full of incense, which are the prayers of saints." The idea is that each one of the twenty-four elders bears an open bowl or censor filled with smoking incense, which pours forth a sweet perfume before the Lord, and this is the symbol of the supplications of the people of God.

9. *And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;*

Blessed be God for this. Some of all sorts are saved, some of all colors, ranks, nations, and ages are saved; some of all conditions of education and morals, some of the poorest, and some of the richest are redeemed: so that when we all assemble in heaven, though we make a motley throng on earth, we shall constitute a united choir, having all our voices tuned to this one note, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

10. *And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*

In heaven they praise Christ, not merely as mediator and as redeemer, but as the donor of their dignities. They are kings and reign. We too are kings; but as yet we are not known or recognized, and often we ourselves forget our high descent. Up there they are crowned monarchs, but they say, "Thou hast made us kings." They are priests too, as we are now, every one of us. When a fellow comes forward in all sorts of curious garments, and says he is a priest, the poorest child of God may say, "Stand away, and don't interfere with my office: I am a priest; I know not what you may be." The priesthood belongs to all the saints. They sometimes call you laity, but the Holy Ghost says of all the saints, "Ye are God's cleros"—ye are God's clergy. Every child of God is a clergyman or a clergywoman. There are no priestly distinctions known in Scripture.

The most honorable of all monarchs have ever been esteemed to be those who had a right not only to royal, but to sacredotal supremacy—those kings who could wear at one time the crown of loyalty, and at another the mitre of the priesthood, who could both use the censer and hold the scepter—who could offer intercession for the people, and then govern the nations. Those who are kings and priests are great indeed; and here you behold the saint honored, not with one title, or one office, but with two. He is made not a king merely, but a king and a priest; not a priest merely, but a priest and a king. The saint has two offices conferred upon him at once, he is made a priestly monarch and a regal priest.

11-14. *And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.*

What a wonderful gathering together of certain legions of the Lord's hosts we have before us in this chapter! "Ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." Their company cannot be enumuerated in human arithmetic. With perfect unanimity they unite in the hallowed worship, shouting together, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain."

As the Lamb slain he is the object of heavenly reverence. Many will reverence him, I do not doubt, when he comes in his second Advent, in the glory of the Father. Every knee will bow before him, even of apostates and infidels, when they shall see him take to himself his great power and reign; but that is not the worship which he accepts, nor that which proves the offerer to be saved. You must worship him as a sacrifice, and adore him in his lowly character, as the "despised and rejected of men." You must reverence him while others ridicule him, trust his blood while others turn from it with disdain, and so be with him in his humiliation. Accept him as your substitute, trust in him as having made atonement for you; for in heaven they still worship him as the Lamb.

Revelation 6

1, 2. *And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.*

Do you not see him as he rides forth in the gospel, conquering and to conquer? It is the power of the Eternal King whereon Jesus rides to victory. “Thou shalt send the rod of thy strength out of Zion; rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.” The preaching of the gospel is not mere man’s talk; it is Christ riding on his white horse, going forth conquering and to conquer.

3-8. *And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword. And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine. And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with*

death, and with the beasts of the earth.

What visions of judgment! What anxious peerings into the midnight of future banishment and ruin! Ah, then the cravings after a little longer span of life, the clutchings at anything for the bare chance of hope. May your ears be spared the dreadful outcry of the spirit when it feels itself seized by the hand invisible and dragged downward to its certain doom. Give me sooner to be shut up in prison for months and years than to stand by dying beds such as I have myself witnessed. They have written their memorial on my young heart; the scars of the wounds they gave me are there still. Why the faces of some men, like mirrors, reflect the flames of hell while yet they live. All this, however, is but of secondary importance compared with that which follows death. To the ungodly there is awful significance in that verse, “I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.”

9-11. *And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*

Certainly, there is room for prayer in heaven. Perhaps the prayers of the saints are the major portion of that perpetual litany which goeth up to heaven. But leaving that for a moment, let us imitate them. If they pray, how much more reason have we If they plead for the universal Church, they who enjoy the rest of God, how should we pray who are still in this land of temptation and of sin, who see the perils of our brethren, know their weaknesses and their afflictions. Let us draw near unto God; let us never cease day and night to offer intercession for the whole company of the elect.

12–17. *And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of*

hair, and the moon became as blood, and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?

Fly whither they may, those eyes pursue them—those eyes of love more terrible than flames of wrath. Oil, though it be soft, yet burns full furiously; and love on fire is hell. Fiercer than a lion on his prey is love when once it groweth angry for holiness' sake and truth's sake. In that day those who know his love shall admire him beyond measure; but those who know his wrath shall equally feel that "he is great." Though it be their hell to feel it, yet shall they know that there is none so great as he, when he shall take the iron rod, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Their cries of remorse and despair, as they rise up to the throne of his awful majesty, shall proclaim to an awe-struck universe that Jesus is great. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

Revelation 7

1. *And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.*

Observe that God has servants ever ready for his work. There were winds to be restrained. “And I saw four angels,”—mighty spiritual beings—who had power over the air. These winds were to be restrained until all God’s people were safely sealed and you may depend upon it that no calamity shall happen to destroy the people of God, they must first be saved. There shall be no deluge till there is the ark; there shall be no Romans to destroy Jerusalem till there is a little city in the mountains to which the disciples may flee. God will protect his own. The dead calm, the perfect quietude which prevailed while the angels restrained the winds is set forth in these words. The wind did not appear to blow on land, or sea, or tree, not a ripple broke the surface of the waters, not a leaf stirred on the bough, everything is quiet until God’s people are secured.

2, 3. *And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their forehead.*

See how other things are protected for the sake of God’s people. The earth and the sea and even the trees, have a cordon of safety round about them while God’s people are being scoured. When the Lord Jesus put to sea on the Galilean lake, we read that there were with him many other little ships, and when the calm came for his ship they were in the calm, too. And so it is a good thing if you are not in the Church, yet to have some sort of connection with it; a great thing for

the age to have the Church of God in it, for God will take care of a nation often for the sake of his people. As he would have spared Sodom had there been righteous men found in it, so doth he spare nations for the sake of his saints.

4. *And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.*

Remember he that wrote this Book in the Father of them, and children's names are not wearisome to their own father. Remember, he that fills this Book bought them with his blood, and wore them upon his breastplate as the great High Priest of Israel; bearing all these names upon his heart, graven upon the palms of his hands. We need not be weary of hearing names which Christ has worn on his breast.

5–8. *Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand.*

The order is not that of nature, but of grace, else Reuben would have come first. And the election of God is not according to birth or blood, but according to his sovereign will. Judah: then Reuben.

Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nepthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

Juda stands first and Benjamin stands last: they were joined together, but here they are as widely divided as they can be, yet they stand in an equal position; and the day shall come when first and last shall rejoin together in the equal blessing of the Most High. Where is Dan? Not mentioned here. See, there is

nothing without mystery. We shall never understand all the things of God. It seemed simple enough to bless the twelve tribes, and yet there is one wanting.

9. *After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude,*

This is the great gathering of the Gentile multitude redeemed by blood, numbered by God, never to be numbered by men, being like the sand on the seashore, innumerable. Of all colors they shall be, and they will look to us on earth if we could see them, to be a motley group, and if we heard them speak it would seem a strange jargon. Many are the languages of earth, but one is the speech of heaven. All hearts are alike in the kingdom of the Most High, whatever the color of the flesh. Do you know, that entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem seems to me to be the pattern we have here before us, only this is the fulfillment of it. Here are the crowds that gathered about him, the twelve disciples lead the way, and here are the multitudes with the palms in their hands scattering them in the pathway of their king.

which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb

Our numbering can go a very long way, what, therefore, must be the countless hosts of the redeemed who are to be “a great multitude, which no man could number?” And what an infinite variety there will be among them, seeing that they shall not only be “of all nations,” but out of those nations they shall be of all kindreds, and people, and tongues,”—that is, all sorts and conditions of men, of every race, and of every age from the first century down to the last. Christ’s immeasurable redemption price must bring, to him a great reward. Isaiah long ago foretold that “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied;” and it is no little result that will satisfy him for such travail of soul as he endured.

clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

White robes to set forth their purity, their victory, and their entrance into the marriage state, for such was the color usually worn on such occasions. “Clothed with white robes,” to show that they had entered into their rest, so that their garments were no longer soiled through their toil. They have reached their

everlasting Sabbath, their week-day service is over for ever.

10. *And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.*

In Jerusalem they cried Hosanna, which was “Save, Lord,” but now they have risen a little higher, and they sing, “Salvation to our God.” It is the same melody but it is pitched to a loftier key, and there are more to sing it; and they are not now conducting a prince to his throne but they are looking up to the king upon his throne, reigning there.

11. *And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,*

The angels form the outer ring. The elders, who represent the Church of the redeemed, are nearer to the throne of God than even the holy angels are. Nearest to God in heaven are those who have been redeemed from among men. How high a dignity—how noble an estate—awaits us by-and-by! But, all alike, both saved men and unfallen angels, “fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,”—

12. *Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.*

Grand ascriptions of praise to make the worship perfect, as all worship should be which is presented to God—as all worship will be when we shall once get to heaven.

You see that all the glory is given to God; man is lost sight of, humanitarianism has no place of honor in heaven, though many, nowadays, make so much of it here on earth. It is unto Father, Son, and Spirit, unto the one only Creator, Saviour, Inspirer that the angels ascribe “blessing, end glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might,...for ever and ever.”

What a deep, sonorous Amen that will be! What a mighty volume of sound! How full and rich, how hearty! Oh, that our ears may be there to hear it, and our tongues to swell it.

13. *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me,*

In reply, as it were, to John's question put by the very look of his countenance. Sometimes, the Lord Jesus Christ gave an answer to men who had never spoken to him; and the angelic elder here followed his example, and also in another respect imitated his Lord, by replying to the inquisitive glance of John by asking him a question.

What are these which are arrayed in white robes and whence came they? "And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest." You see the question was put by an angel, as an answer one of the elders answered. Whom did he answer? Why, John; and what John's heart was inquiring. He was saying to himself, "Who are these?" And one of the elders was responsive to his heart's inquiry, and put the same inquiry into words on his behalf.

I venture to believe that this elder used to teach a catechumen class on earth; that he had been in the habit of teaching young people, and he put the question to John first, as he had been in the habit aforetime of putting it to young disciples on earth. The saved ones would be ready to teach us now, if they could; and they do today bear testimony for Christ, for to the ages to come God through his Church makes known to principalities and powers the exceeding riches of his grace.

14–15. *And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.*

Shall "tabernacle over them," that is the exact word, as though he were a

pavilion, a canopy over them.

16–17. *They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*

This is to be the future state of all those who are redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus, and to whom the saving grace of God has come: so that, concerning all who have thus fallen asleep, we sorrow not as those without hope, for we know that all is well with them for ever.

It looks almost as if they might have a tear in their eye when they first come there; certainly they shall never be sure of being without a tear till they have crossed the pearly threshold, but then he shall wipe away the very tear, there shall be no possibility of weeping there. May our eyes behold that sinless and sorrowless land, and its Eternal Lord!

Revelation 8

Spurgeon never preached or commented on this chapter.

Revelation 9

Spurgeon never preached or commented on this chapter.

Revelation 10

Spurgeon never preached or commented on this chapter.

Revelation 11

Spurgeon never preached or commented on this chapter.

Revelation 12

1. *And there appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:*

This is that woman of whom the promise runs, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” John saw this in a vision in the heavenly places; he saw the Church of God, enthroned, made glorious, clothed with the sun, having the brightness of divine light about her, with all that is variable, changeable as “the moon under her feet, and upon her head the crown “that her Lord had given, her”—twelve patriarchs, twelve prophets, twelve apostles, a complete number of glorious lights kindled from heaven.

2. *And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.*

That child that is born of her, that seed of the woman, that shall bruise the serpent’s head is: first, Christ, and then all the first-born, of whom he is the great representative.

3 *And there appeared another wonder’ in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.*

The spirit of evil in the heavenlies fighting with the power of light and goodness and grace, a mysterious being with great power, high intelligence, seven heads, ten horns, and having mighty influence over multitudes of men, so that there were seven crowns upon his seven heads.

4. *And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth:*

The crocodile, which, I suppose, was the earthly figure from which John's dream sprang, has great force in its tail; and Satan doubtless of old drew from heaven a number of its stars—other angels fell with him. And there are times in the heavens of the church when the ministers fall; they seem to go in companies. Those who should be lights for God, are into darkness, and become teachers of heresy "He did cast them down to the earth." They lost their brightness, they betrayed their earthly origin.

and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

Remember how he sought to slay Jesus; and the like is the case of all the man-children born unto God, who will be of service in the kingdom of God. The main attack of the dragon was against the child: the main attack of the power of evil is against Christ and everything Christly. If he could destroy the gospel, he would not care about the church one whit: the woman might go if the man-child could be destroyed.

5. *And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.*

That is the brief history of the birth of Christ, and of his going from us. He "was caught up unto GOD, and to his throne." God will take care of the great principle of truth. If it cannot have a refuge on earth, he will find it a refuge in heaven.

6. *And the woman fled into the wilderness where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.*

The church of GOD was long in obscurity. You can hardly find it among the Albigenses and Waldenses. It was hidden away among the mounts. The

Wycliffites, and the Lollards, and others, held fast the truth; but history scarcely records their names. The woman was in the wilderness, hidden away for many a day. “And there was war in heaven.” You are not to think of heaven as a place, but among the heavenlies. John, in a vision, saw the great contending powers of evil. He was like the prophet when he saw a mountain full of horses of fire and chariots of fire.

7. *And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels.*

War always will rage between the two great sovereignties until one or other be crushed. Peace between good and evil is an impossibility; the very pretence of it would, in fact, be the triumph of the powers of darkness. Michael will always fight; his holy soul is vexed with sin, and will not endure it. Jesus will always be the dragon’s foe, and that not in a quiet sense, but actively, vigorously, with full determination to exterminate evil. All His servants, whether angels in heaven or messengers on earth, will and must fight; they are born to be warriors-at the cross they enter into covenant never to make truce with evil; they are a warlike company, firm in defence and fierce in attack. The duty of every soldier in the army of the Lord is daily, with all his heart, and soul, and strength, to fight against the dragon.

The dragon and his angels will not decline the affray; they are incessant in their onslaughts, sparing no weapon, fair or foul. We are foolish to expect to serve God without opposition: the more zealous we are, the more sure are we to be assailed by the myrmidons of hell. The church may become slothful, but not so her great antagonist; his restless spirit never suffers the war to pause; he hates the woman’s seed, and would fain devour the church if he could. The servants of Satan partake much of the old dragon’s energy, and are usually an active race. War rages all around, and to dream of peace is dangerous and futile.

8. *And prevailed not: neither was their place found any more in heaven.*

You remember how our Lord, who is the true Michael, the only great archangel, said at the beginning of the preaching of the gospel, “I beheld Satan as lightning falling from heaven.” His power among the heavenlies is gone; he was cast out

of the place called heaven; so is he now, by the preaching of the gospel, and by the death of Christ, cast down from am(rag the heavenly influences.

9. *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

This was done in the olden time as a matter of fact. It is done continually, spiritually, as Christ is lifted up, and his gospel gets the victory.

10. *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren its cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*

Always at it! this prince of evil pretending to goodness, and daring to bring accusations against the Holy One of God. But he is not permitted now to stand in the court; he is hurled from his high place. He used his place with a desperate pertinacity of malice, accusing the brethren day and night.

11 *And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

We too often think of the saints that have gone before as if they were men of another race from ourselves, capable of nobler things, endowed with graces which we cannot reach, and adorned with holiness impossible to us. The medieval artists were wont to paint the saints with rings of glory about their heads, but indeed they had no such halos; their brows were furrowed with care even as ours, and their hair grew grey with grief. Their light was within, and we may have it; their glory was by grace, and the same grace is available for us.

It is a theme for gladness in heaven that they did fight and resist and overcome. Those white robes mean victories, so do those palms; but there could not have been victories if there had never been conflicts. There is joy among the angels, for they had their conflict when they stood firm against temptation, and did not

swerve when the dragon's tail swept away a third part of the stars of heaven: but ours will be a victory peculiarly sweet, a song especially melodious, because our battle has been peculiarly severe. We fell, we rose again, we were kept, upheld, sustained, and enabled to overcome at last, and therefore will we rejoice for ever before the throne of God.

They overcame Satan's terrors with the blood of atonement. Satan is the great red dragon, a hideous seven-headed python, horrible to look upon, horned, like the serpent called the Egyptian Cerastes. Man dreads the serpent race, and would dread most a monster so dire as this, so full of poison, so red with fury. The conflict appears to be unequal enough between this horrid monstrosity and the seed of a timid woman. Yet when we are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus we are invulnerable, and fear not the dragon, for we remember the promise which saith, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder." When the atonement brings peace to our hearts, the great dragon dwindles down to a mere snake with a broken head, of which it is written, "Upon thy belly thou shalt go and dust shalt thou eat." We can see the heel mark of Christ upon his broken head, and what is more we expect to set our own heel there, for we are told that the Lord will bruise Satan under our foot shortly.

12. *Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea for the devil is come down unto you, having great wraith, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*

"Therefore rejoice ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them." Let great joy be in the hearts of all spiritual beings, whether angels or men, for Satan is cast down from among them. But the battle is not over; the scene of it is only transferred from the heavenlies to the earthly. "Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you having great wrath because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." We may expect him to rage more and more as the time of his destruction comes nearer and nearer. He is like a bad tenant; he will damage the house out of which he is to be ejected. But he is to be ejected, and let God be glorified for it.

13. *And when the dragon saw that he was cant unto the earth the persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.*

He had changed his place, but he did not change his nature; and so he still perseveres in his attack upon God.

14, 15. *And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and halt a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.*

Read history and see what fierce and brutal persecutions were used like floods against the gospel of Christ.

16. *And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and wallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.*

It is poor help that the earth can give, and yet God has over-ruled to make it useful. The kings and the powers of this world have for their own reasons sometimes protected the church. It was so in Luther's day. The jealousy that was felt of the influence of the Court of Rome politically tended to the preservation of Luther and those round about him, so that the gospel was not destroyed. "The earth helped the woman," and we may expect that even those political disasters, which we often dread, will all tend float way. How often has priestly arrogance been put to the blush even for political reasons! We have nothing to do with that, but still we can see how God can over-rule. It is always amiss when a woman begins to help the earth: she has nothing to do with that: let the Church leave the State alone. But sometimes it happens that in the political providence of God the earth helps the woman.

17. *And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have testimony of Jesus Christ.*

"And the dragon was wrath with the woman." If ever you meet with a church of God which the devil likes, it is good for nothing; but if it is a true church of God, if it holds the truth, and if it walks in holiness, it will always be true. "And the

dragon was wrath with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed." He had destroyed many already with that flood of persecution, and he kept on a battle with the remnant of her seed, "which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Into the deep mysteries of this passage I have not attempted to go, but have simply skimmed the surface.

Revelation 13

Spurgeon never preached or commented on this chapter.

Revelation 14

1. *And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb*

John always writes of Jesus as the “Lamb.” His Lord is to him in his sacrificial character always “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” by the shedding of his blood. “I looked, and, lo, a Lamb”—

stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand,

They are all there, a vast number, a complete number, the exact number which in the seventh chapter of this Book had been described as sealed.

They are all there without exception; not one of them is lost, but they all stand fast as a great army surrounding their glorious Leader. In the darkest times, Christ has his Church still around him; it is with him as it was when the Lord said to Elijah, “Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.” Be of good courage; if your eyes are but anointed with the heavenly eye-salve, you may see, as John saw, the Lamb on mount Sion, surrounded by multitudes of faithful followers.

having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.

The Revised Version has it, “having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads.” Now they are known to be the Lord’s; on earth that fact was questioned, but his name is written on their foreheads now. Sometimes they themselves had to question it, but now it is apparent to all, the distinguishing mark is stamped upon their brow: “having his Father’s name

written in their foreheads."

2. *And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:*

It was very loud, but very sweet. It is not easy in earthly music to blend the two: but in heaven, all the energies of living men shall be thrown into the song; and yet it shall be sweet as the touch of a minstrel when he lays his fingers gently among the strings of the harp.

3. *And they sung as it were a new song before the throne,*

They could not sing any old song there. The songs of earth, sweet as some of them are, are not good enough to be sung in heaven. With a new experience, new delights, and a clearer vision of their Lord, they must have a new song.

and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

Heaven is not the place to learn that song; it must be learned on the earth You must learn here the notes of free grace and dying love; and when you have mastered their melody, you will be able to offer to the Lord the tribute of a grateful heart, even in heaven, and blend it with the harmonies eternal. Suppose, for a moment, that you could go there, and that you were unprepared to sing the new song, you would have to say, "I cannot join in the chorus, for I do not know the tune." You must learn the song now, the new song of praise unto our God, or you cannot be admitted there. I should not expect, if I went down to the Handel Festival, for the conductor to permit me to take a place in the choir. He would ask me "Can you sing?

Have you ever rehearsed the matchless music of Handel?" and when I answered "No," be would tell me to stand aside; so you must learn the music of Calvary, you must learn the music of the name of Jesus, or you cannot sing in heaven. No man could learn the song but the redeemed from the earth; not redeemed, you

see, by a general redemption, of which some so loudly talk; but redeemed from among men by a special redemption, which took them out from the rest of mankind, by a price paid for them, so that they were bought as others were not bought, by the precious blood of Jesus, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot.

4. *These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins.*

This is the Scriptural metaphor for those who have not turned aside to idol gods, or to false opinions, or to unholy practices. You remember how Paul longed to present the Corinthian Christians "as a chaste virgin" to Christ; he desired that Christ might have all their love. These servants of God are of this sort, wholly the Lord's.

These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

Let no man deny, then, that there is a special and particular redemption of God's people. All men are not redeemed as these were redeemed, else the expression would be untruthful, or without meaning: "These were redeemed from among men." There is an elect company for whom Christ especially laid down his life; they are his, and they are made to know that they are his, and to take the position of a blood-bought people who belong not to themselves, but to him who has bought them with his blood. These are the hundred and forty and four thousand who stand on the mount Sion with the Lamb in the midst of them.

5. *And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.*

Kept, by divine grace, pure in doctrine, holy in life, devout in heart; these are the body-guard of the Lamb, the chosen companions of the King of kings, whose reward shall be unspeakably great for ever and ever.

6. *And I saw*

What wonderful sights John saw! I do not wonder that, he saw them; he had leaned his bead on Christ's bosom, and that qualified him to see what you and I cannot see. Near communion to Christ is the best qualification for a vision of mystery. Get thee into the very heart of Christ, and thou shalt see wonderful things.

6, 7. *Another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach, unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,*

This vision represents the spread of the gospel. It is generally referred to the Reformation period, when, on a sudden, the truth, which had so long lain hidden in old musty tomes, was proclaimed in every market-place. Beneath many a "gospel oak" the good news was told out—the good news concerning Christ—as if an angel were flying through the midst of heaven. This preaching of the truth led to the commencement of the downfall of Rome, which is here called Babylon, and which is ultimately to fall to utter and everlasting ruin.

7. *Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.*

Is this the gospel? It is one version, evidently, of the everlasting gospel. "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." Truly, to worship him as he reveals himself, is true godliness; and in it lies all the gospel: "Having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him."

8. *And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city,*

Babylon always goes down when the gospel is preached; the very flight of the

angelic preachers is sufficient to make old Rome totter to her fall. So our fathers used to explain this chapter, for so they understood it. I am not sure whether it refers to that or to any other particular form of anti-Christ; but whatever it may be, whenever the gospel is exalted, down goes the devil, and down goes the whole Babylonian system.

because she made as nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

That is spiritual fornication, as we understand it in the Old Testament—man's idolatry—the setting up of visible objects of worship, instead of the invisible God. And what is there, in all the world, that is so idolatrous as the so-galled "religion" of Rome? She multiplieth her idol gods to great excess—her grosses and her crucifixes, her saints and her saintesses, her "sacraments" and her relics, her "old cast clouts" and her "old rotten rags." The Papacy is the most paganish of all the paganisms that have ever existed on the face of the earth; but it is to come to an end, for the mouth of the Lord hath said so.

9, 10. *And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:*

How we ought to dread any collusion with deadly error, any fellowship with the hypocrisies and falsehoods of those who would deceive, for if we receive the mark of the beast either in our forehead, so as to have unbelieving thoughts, or in our hand, so as to do evil deeds, we shall have to suffer in company with Babylon, that great system of error which is only an imitation and a counterfeit of Christianity! What tremendously terrible words these are: "He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb"!

They sometimes say that we talk very terribly about the world to come. Do we say more than the Scripture says? Do we use more terrific emblems than the

Holy Ghost uses when he speaks after this fashion? This is a generation that is not to be pleased, neither do we seek to please it. God's wrath is terrible, and our language cannot be too strong to express the overwhelming power of it.

11. *And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.*

Keep you true to Christ; wear his name in your forehead. Follow no system of error; do not be deluded either by Ritualism or Rationalism, by superstition or by unbelief. Keep close to the Word of God, and ask to be taught of the Spirit of God.

12. *Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.*

Truly, Rome has tried "the patience of the saints." What country is there in Europe which has not been dyed crimson with the blood of the martyrs? The rack, the stake, the brook, the dungeon, the fires, all sorts of cruelties have been practiced upon those who "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Let the valleys of Piedmont speak; do they not cry aloud to our God for vengeance? Let the St. Bartholomew massacre bear witness before the living God. Let the stakes of Smithfield say, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

13. *And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.*

It matters not where they die, or under what ignominy they die—whether branded with the name of heretic, or cast out as the offscouring of all things, yet blessed are they, and their works follow them to heaven to bear witness to their faith, and they spiritually, continue to live on earth to propagate the gracious seed for which they laid down their lives.

14-16. *And I looked, and behold a while cloud,*

One of these days, every eye will look and see what is here described. A little time may elapse, but it will soon be past. How quickly years fly away! Think where you will be in the day when you, too, will say, “I looked, and behold a white cloud.”

and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

This is the gathering in of the godly, who are Christ’s wheat. He himself reaps them; no angel, mark you, but himself, with his own sharp sickle and with his own dear hand. These are his sheaves, he sowed for wheat; he himself was that wheat which fell into the ground and died, and brought forth much fruit. So he, into his own bosom, gathers his own sheaves with his own hand. “May I be among them!” Make that your prayer tonight.

May I be one golden ear in Christ’s great harvest!”

17. *And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.*

Not this time the King, but an angel; not the Son of man that sat on the cloud, but an angel, the servant of God, deputed to execute vengeance.

18. *And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; And cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.*

This is the ingathering of the ungodly, they are not the Lord's harvest, they are the vintage of his wrath. This vintage is not reaped by him who wears the golden crown, the Lord Jesus Christ himself; but by one of his angels, who is bidden to thrust in his sharp sickle, and reap, for the hour of divine judgment has at last come.

19. *And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.*

Shall any of us ever be cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God? We shall, if we continue growing upon the evil vine, and are not grafted into Christ, the true and living Vine.

20. *And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.*

By which striking symbol the apostle describes the greatness and the terror of the overthrow which must happen to the ungodly when once God begins to deal with them in judgment. Oh, that the abounding mercy of God would give us a place in his great harvest, and not leave us to be gathered in the vintage of his wrath, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake!

Revelation 15

Spurgeon never preached or commented on this chapter.

Revelation 16

1-7. *And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.*

That which conics from the Righteous God is itself righteous. Jehovah both saith and doth that which is right, and that alone. This is a great stay to the soul in time of trouble. When we are most sorely afflicted, and cannot see the reason for the dispensation, we may fall back upon this most sure and certain fact, that God is righteous, and his dealings with us are righteous too. It should be our glory to sing this brave confession when all things around us appear to suggest the contrary.

8. *And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.*

This angel, you perceive, poured his vial on the sun, and by way of the sun, with

his scorching heat, the proudest sons of men were visited. The noble and the great, the rich and the healthy, could not bear the increased solar heat, for the day burned as an oven. We know not by how many doors God can come at the guilty, but come at them he will when once his arm is bared for war. When he saith, "Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries," who shall withstand him?

9-11. *And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.*

Judgments, even the most terrible of them, do not in themselves produce a satisfactory repentance in the minds of men. The terrors of the Lord produced blasphemy, but they did not produce repentance. A man that has suffered divine judgment, and yet goes back to sin, increases his guilt, because there is the element of defiance in his obstinacy. He has come to be like Pharaoh, who stoutly resisted Jehovah and his commands. Let the Lord send his plagues: Pharaoh will brazen it out with him.

12-15. *And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*

"We die daily," said the apostle. This was the life of the early Christians; they went everywhere with their lives in their hands. We are not in this day called to pass through the same fearful persecutions: if we were, the Lord would give us

grace to bear the test; but the tests of Christian life, at the present moment, though outwardly not so terrible, are yet more likely to overcome us than even those of the fiery age. We have to bear the sneer of the world-that is little; its blandishments, its soft words, its oily speeches, its fawning, its hypocrisy, are far worse. Our danger is lest we grow rich and become proud, lest we give ourselves up to the fashions of this present evil world, and lose our faith. Or if wealth be not the trial, worldly care is quite as mischievous. If we cannot be torn in pieces by the roaring lion, if we may be hugged to death by the bear, the devil little cares which it is, so long as he destroys our love to Christ, and our confidence in Him.

I fear me that the Christian church is far more likely to lose her integrity in these soft and silken days than in those rougher times. We must be awake now, for we traverse the enchanted ground, and are most likely to fall asleep to our own undoing, unless our faith in Jesus be a reality, and our love to Jesus a vehement flame. Many in these days of easy profession are likely to prove tares, and not wheat; hypocrites with fair masks on their faces, but not the true-born children of the living God. Christian, do not think that these are times in which you can dispense with watchfulness or with holy ardour; you need these things more than ever, and may God the eternal Spirit display His omnipotence in you, that you may be able to say, in all these softer things, as well as in the rougher, “We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.”

16-21. *And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.*

As the mighty Jehovah smote Pharaoh with overwhelming plagues, so doth the Lord in this awful portion of the Apocalypse deal with the ungodly. Seven angels stood forth, each one with his vial full of the wrath of God, to be poured out upon the earth. Seven executioners were needed, and seven were present: a perfect number for the accomplishment of the divine purpose.

Revelation 17

Spurgeon never preached or commented on this chapter.

Revelation 18

Spurgeon never preached or commented on this chapter.

Revelation 19

1–4. *And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, praying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshiped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen: Alleluia.*

Heaven and earth are equally glad, and they unite to adore the living God when the great apostasy, that has so long cursed the nations, is hurled into the sea. For the overthrow of a monstrous system of error gives delight to all holy spirits, and chiefly to those who stand nearest the eternal throne.

5. *And a voice came out of the throne saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.*

Whose voice was that? It was not the voice of the Eternal God; for it said, “Praise our God, all ye his servants.” Whose voice, then, could it be? No one but God could be upon the throne save the Lamb, who is God. Surely, it was he who said, “Praise our God.” He speaks the word which calls on all the servants of God to praise him, because his complete victory had come. Longing to see of the travail of his soul, earnest to gather in all his elect, he speaks; for the fullness of time has come, when his joy shall be full, and he shall rejoice over the whole company of his redeemed as for ever one with himself.

6. *And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the*

voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

And his great power is never better seen than in crushing the powers of darkness, and putting the hosts of evil to the rout. The harlot church is put away: the true church is introduced, fully arrayed in perfect holiness, ready for the consummation of her own joy, and her master's—her last delight.

7. *Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.*

Up till now the church has always been spoken of as his bride, now she is "his wife"—that is a deeper, dearer, morematured word than "bride": "his wife hath made herself ready." The church has now come to the fullness of her joy, and has taken possession of her status and dower as "his wife." She willingly and of her own accord comes to her Lord, to be his, and to be with him for ever. This she does with all her heart: "she hath made herself ready." She does not enter into this engagement with reluctance. Grace is the great liberating force. The will is a slave to evil, till grace comes, and makes it free to choose that which is good. She has struggled against error, she has fought against infidelity, and both have been put down by her holy watchfulness and earnest testimony; and so she is ready for her Lord.

8. *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.*

Whatever preparation it was that she made, in whatever apparel she was arrayed, it was granted to her. Observe that the harlot church wore fine linen also, but then she had with it purple, and silk, and scarlet, and precious stones, and pearls. I do not know whence the harlot obtained her apparel, but I know where the true church found her wedding dress, for it is written, "to her was granted."

We shall have a complete array of righteousnesses in Christ's righteousness, active and passive—a garment for the head, and a garment for the feet, and for the loins. What righteousnesses we have! Righteousness imparted by the power of the Spirit; righteousness imputed by the decree of God. Every form of

righteousness will go to make up the believer's outfit; only, all of it is granted, and none of it is of our own purchasing.

9. *And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they, which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.*

It was to be written, no doubt, to bring it under our consideration as a thing worthy of being weighed, a text to be read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested; not merely spoken to John by the angel of God, but written by the apostle at the express order of the Spirit of God.

There will come a time when all God's redeemed shall be saved. There will come a day when all who have died shall have been raised again from the tomb, and those who remain alive shall have been changed, so that their corruption shall have put on incorruption, and mortality shall have put on immortality. Then will the Church be perfect and complete; no one member will be missing. There will be no spot or wrinkle remaining in her. Then it shall come to pass that Christ will celebrate this marriage supper, which will be the bringing of the people of God into the closest and happiest union with Christ their Lord in glory.

It may be only a few days, or weeks, or months, certainly only a few years at most, and we shall share all the glory that awaits the Church; and the glory of our dear Lord, who loved us, and gave himself for us, will be ours, and ours for ever. What bliss to be there! What joy to be there, not as spectators, but as part of the Bride that shall then be taken by her Husband!

And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Lest any doubt should arise in our minds about the marriage supper of the Lamb, or about the fact that many are called to that supper, or about the blessedness of such as are called, the angel says, "These are the true sayings of God." Some things appear to be too good to be true. We frequently meet with sinners, under a sense of guilty who are staggered by the greatness of God's mercy. The light of the gospel has been too bright for them; they "could not see for the glory of that light," as Paul said in describing the appearance of Christ to him when on the road to Damascus. So, "to make assurance doubly sure," that we may not question its truth because of its greatness, we have this solemn declaration

specially certified by order of the Lord, under the hand and seal of the Spirit of God: “These are the true sayings of God.”

10. *And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

If John made a mistake, because the saints in heaven are all so like their Master, it is well that the mistake was at once corrected, for angel-worship, or the worship of saints, is to be avoided by all saints. And God’s word about it is, “See thou do it not.” It is said that we should certainly pay reverence to holy men that are now with God, but see thou do it not.

Indeed, here, among men, the same kind of idolatry is sought to be kept up, and the preacher is arrayed in garments to make him distinct from the people, as though he were something better or different from them, and not their fellow-servant. But, for all this, let us hear the voice which says, “See thou do it not. I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus.” Worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

11. *And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse;*

By a horse is denoted, not only honor, but power. To the Jews the employment of the horse in warfare was unusual, so that when it was used by their adversaries they imputed to it great force. Jesus Christ has a mighty power today, a power which none can measure, he was crucified in weakness, but where is the weakness now? He gave his hands to the nail, and his feet to be fastened to the wood, but he does so no longer. Now has he mounted on the horse of his exceeding great power, and he ruleth in heaven and in earth, and none can stay his hand, or put him to dishonor, or dispute his will.

and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True,

The work he undertook to do he has accomplished. He has in nothing drawn back from the covenant engagements under which he laid himself of old. He

stood as the surely of his people, and he has been faithful and true to that smarting suretyship. He came to be the deliverer of his elect, and he has wrought the deliverance, he has not turned either to the right hand or to the left, but he has been faithful and true to every pledge which he gave to his Father for the deliverance of his chosen.

and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

Jesus is the only king who always wars in this fashion. There have been brilliant exceptions to the general rule, but war is usually as deceitful as it is bloody, and the words of diplomatists are a mass of lies. It seems impossible that men should deliberate about peace and war without straightway forgetting the meaning of words and the bonds of honesty: War still seems to be a piece of business in which truth would be out of place; it is a matter so accursed that falsehood is there most at home, and righteousness quits the plain. But as for our King, it is in righteousness that he doth judge and make war. Christ's kingdom needs no deception: the plainest speech and the clearest truth—these are the weapons of our warfare

12. *His eyes were as a flame of fire,*

Those eyes like a flame of fire belong to our Champion that he may understand all the plots and crafts of all our foes. We are sometimes alarmed; we say that the machinations of Rome are very deep, and that the plots of infidelity dive very low. But what mattereth it? His eyes are like a flame of fire: he knows what they are at. He will confound their politics, he will expose their knavish tricks, and still lead on his host conquering and to conquer. Let us never fear while he is on the white horse with such eyes as his.

and on his head were many crowns;

The last he had seen there was a crown of thorns; but that was gone, and in the place of the one crown of the briars of the earth he saw many crowns of the jewels of heaven. There rests the crown of creation, for this Word made heaven and earth: the crown of providence, for this man now rules the nations with a rod of iron: the crown of grace, for it is from his royal hand that blessings are

bestowed: the crown of the church, for be it known to all men that there is no head of the church but Christ, and woe unto those who steal the title. He is head over all things to his church, and king in the midst of her. Yes, on his head are many crowns, placed there by individual souls that he has saved. We have each one tried to crown him in our poor way, and we will do so as long as we live. All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth, and therefore well may multitudes of diadems fillet that august brow which once was belted with thorns.

and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

No man knoweth his name. None know all his nature. His love passes your knowledge; his goodness, his majesty, his humiliation, his glory, all these transcend your ken. You cannot know him. Oh, the depths! If you plunge deepest into the mystery of the incarnate God you can never reach the bottom of it.

13. *And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood:*

Oh, but this is the grandest thought about our Master wherever he may be, that he is ever a red man wearing the bloody garment. As the atoning sacrifice he is at his best. We love him as we see the white lily of his perfect nature, but the rose of Sharon is the flower for us, for its sweet perfume breathes life to our fainting souls. Yes, he bled, and this is the greatest thing we can say of him. His life was glorious, but his death transcends it. A diving Christ, a reigning Christ—we are charmed as we think of this; but oh, the bleeding Christ, the bleeding Christ for me! As the blood is the life, so is his blood life to us—the life of the gospel, the life of our hopes: and one delights to think of him that, though he rides the white horse, he has never stript off the bloody shirt in which he won our redemption. He looks like a Lamb that has been slain, and wears his priesthood still. Whenever he goes out to conquer it is with this harness on, this vesture dipped in blood.

and his name is called The Word of God.

That same Logos of whom John wrote in the gospel now stands before him, and he beholds him in his glory. That a delight it must have been to the seer of Patmos to see his Lord and Master once again in different array from that in

which he had beheld him when, in humiliation he tabernacled here among the cons of men! His name is still the same—the Logos—the Word of God.

14. *And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.*

All his true ones, all his faithful ones, all his saints, whether ministers or not, the heavenly armies, "followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean." Holiness is their armor, light is the panoply that they wear as they go forward to this holy war.

15. *And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword,*

He bears a sword. But where? It is in his mouth! Strange place! A sword in his mouth. Yet this is the only sword my Lord and Master wields. Mahomet subdued men with the scimetar, but Christ subdues men with the gospel. We have but to tell out the glad tidings of the love of God, for this is the sword of Christ with which he smites the nations.

that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Ah, what a crush must that be which will come upon the clusters of Gomorrah from the foot which once was nailed to the tree. Who stamped that sinner's soul and crushed it down? Was he an angry angel with a sword of fire? It was the Christ of God, the man of love; rejected and despised. Fiercer than a lion on prey is love when once provoked. When love turns to jealousy its fires are like coals of juniper, which have a violent flame. Beware, ye despisers, lest ye continue to despise. Submit to the sword of his mouth, lest ye be smitten by his hand. Be wise when once his hand begins to smite lest you have to feel his foot, for it is all over then.

16. *And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.*

And this is the man of Nazareth. This is the crucified, despised, and rejected once. Servus servorum once.—Servant of servants but now King of kings and Lord of lords. And what will the end be of the battle that he wager? Will any of his adversaries escape? Will they hold their own? No, they shall utterly be destroyed before him. All the powers of evil of false doctrine everything contrary to his mind—shall be destroyed. And this is set forth in symbolic imagery by the dreadful battle feast which usually succeeds a battle, when the vultures smell the carrion from afar and come to rend the spoil. It shall not be thus with the bodies of men, but thus with evil—thus with the powers of darkness.

17-21. *And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.*

By this highly figurative language, we are to understand that, when Christ goes forth to war in battling for the truth, and his true followers come after him, their victory will be certain, and the slain of the Lord will be many. We look not for carnage and bloodshed to establish the kingdom of Christ in the earth; but this revelation gives us a picture of the utter overthrow and destruction of all forms of error through the power of the everlasting gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen, so let it be! Would God that the King of kings would mount his white horse at once, and that all his people would follow him! He will do so at the right time, and

then the victory shall be unto God, and to the truth, and to love, and to peace and holiness, for evermore.

Revelation 20

1-5. *And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*

You have perhaps imagined that all men will rise at the same moment, that the trump of the archangel will break open every grave at the same instant, and sound in the ear of every sleeper at the identical moment. Such I do not think is the testimony of the Word of God. I think the Word of God teaches, and teaches indisputably, that the saints shall rise first. And be the interval of time whatever it may, whether the thousand years are literal years, or a very long period of time, I am not now about to determine; I have nothing to do except with the fact that there are two resurrections, a resurrection of the just, and afterwards of the unjust—a time when the saints of God shall rise, an aftertime when the wicked shall rise to the resurrection of damnation.

6. *Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on*

such the second death hath no power,

The death which shall come upon the ungodly without exception can never touch the righteous. How should it? How can damnation fall on any but those who are sinners and are guilty of sin? But the saints are not guilty of sin. They have sinned like others, and they were by nature the children of wrath even as others. But their sin has been lifted from them: it was laid upon the scapegoats' head of old. Oh, ye flames of hell, how could even so much as the breath of your heat pass upon the man who is safe covered in the Savior's wounds! How is it possible for you, O Deaths, Destructions, Horrors, Glooms, Plagues, and Terrors, so much as to flit like a cloud over the serene sky of the spirit which has found peace with God through the blood of Christ!

but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

There is in the text a distinct promise that the saints are to reign with Christ a thousand years, and I believe they are to reign with him upon this earth. I do look forward to this with joy, that though I may sleep in Christ before my Master come, and I know not whether that shall be or no, yet I shall rise at the day of his appearing, and shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just if I have truly and faithfully served him; and that recompense shall be, to be made like unto him, and to partake of his glories before the eyes of men, and to reign with him during the thousand years.

7-10. *And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

When Martin has painted some of his sublime pictures, he has generally heightened the effect by masses of darkness. Surely, this is the way in which God has painted hell, rather by masses of darkness than by definiteness of light. This much we know, that hell is a place of absence from God—a place for the development of sin, where every passion is unbridled every lust unrestrained—a place where God punishes night and day those who sin night and day—a place where there is never sleep, or rest or hope—a place where a drop of water is denied, though thirst shall burn the tongue—a place where pleasure never breathed, where light never dawned, where anything like consolation was never heard of—a place where the gospel is denied, where mercy droops her wings and dies—a place where vengeance reigns and shakes his Shams, and brandishes his sword—a place of fury and of burning—a place, the like of which imagination hath not pictured. May God grant it may be a place which you shall never see, and whose dread you shall never feel.

11. *And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it,*

There is a throne whereon sitteth the King eternal, immortal, invisible; the world is governed by laws made and kept in force by an intelligent lawgiver. There is a moral governor. Men are accountable, and will be brought to account at the last great day, when they shall all be either rewarded or punished.

from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

As soon as ever this great white throne appeared, heaven and earth began to roll away like a wave receding from the shore. What must he be before whose face heaven and earth shall retreat as in dismay? Christ does not drive away the heaven and the earth; he does not even speak to them; the sight of his face is all that is needed, and the old heaven, and the old sinstained earth, shall begin to flee away, “the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up;” and all that by the mere showing of Christ’s face. He does not have to lift his arm, he has not to seize a javelin, and to hurl it at the condemned earth; at the sight of his face, heaven and earth shall flee away. Behold the terror of Christ’s majesty.

12. *And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*

See you not that the judgment will be done by record, and solemn affidavit, in that great Court of King's Bench. There will be no hurry, no passing over judgment with a light hand, but all will be done in truth and equity, and according to facts recorded by the infallible omniscience of God.

The sentences which will then be pronounced will be so just as to be indisputable, and even the condemned will own the justness thereof. At the last great day not one of the condemned shall be able to deny his guilt, nor the justice of the sentence. Though sent to hell, he will feel it is what he deserves.

13-15. *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

After death the judgment, after judgment the damnation. If it be a dreadful thing to live again, if it be a more dreadful thing still to spend the first day of that life in the grand assize of God, how much more awful shall it be when the sentence is pronounced, and the terror of punishment shall begin! We believe that the souls of the wicked are already tormented, but this judgment will cast both body and soul into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21

1. *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.*

Astronomers tell us that, within living memory, several starry worlds have burnt out, and vanished out of sight. The apostle Peter has told us that this world also will be destroyed by fire, but it will afterwards be renewed, and a new sky and a new earth will appear after the first firmament and the first earth shall have become extinct. God means that this planet should continue to exist after it has had a new creation, and renewed its youth.

The regeneration of his people, their new birth, is a foretaste of what is yet to happen to this whole world of ours. We have the first-fruits of the Spirit, and we groan within ourselves while we wait for the fullness of that new creation.

"The first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea," because the sea is the emblem of separation, and destruction, and unrest. The sea hath her dead which shall be given up. The sea now cannot rest nor be quiet, but all shall be calm and tranquil in the new heaven and the new earth.

2. *And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

John saw, in vision, the glorified Church of God coming to dwell on the new earth, descending for a while from heaven to be the very glory of the newly-created world.

3, 4. *And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they*

shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

When there shall be a new heaven and a new earth, and the Church shall be in her new and glorified condition, then there will be no need for all those purifying forces which have been so active here below. There shall be no death, nor sorrow nor crying, nor pain, nor trial of any kind; all shall be happiness for all shall be holiness. And then, as God dwelt of old among his people in the wilderness, and as Jesus Christ, the Word, was made flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory, so in that new world shall God reveal himself to his people by a special indwelling and a peculiar nearness.

5. *And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.*

Once, the Lord might have said, "Behold, I make all things;" but now he says, "Behold, I make all things new." Glory be unto the great Creator!

Did not the morning stars sing together for joy when he made the world? But equal if not greater glory must be ascribed to the great Regenerator, the New Creator, shall we not all sing together to his praise? Yes, that we shall if we are numbered among the "all things" that he makes new.

6. *And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.*

Probably John did not expect to hear that sweet gospel message just then. The Lord Jesus Christ was speaking of lofty themes, of worlds newly made, and yet in the very middle of it all he puts this gracious promise. Let this be a pattern to all of you who are preachers or teachers, no matter what your subject may be, a gospel promise or invitation is always in place and in season. You may put it among the most golden sentences like a precious stone in a setting of pure gold, and it will never be out of order come when it may. Men hate God without the

slightest reason for doing so, and God loves men without the slightest reason; there was every reason why men should love God, and not hate him; yet they have hated him without a cause, and there is every reason why God should hate man and not love him, yet he loves him so much that he gave his only-begotten Son to die, that whosoever believeth in him may live for ever.

7. *He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*

What a wonderful word is that! "He shall be my son,"—not my servant, but "my son." God give us the faith to rise to this more than royal dignity! "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."

8. *But the fearful,*

No, that is not the right word, it is the cowardly, for there are many who are full of fear who are nevertheless most sincere and right in God's sight: "But the cowardly,"—

and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers,

And the apostle John tells us that "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer—

and whoremongers,

Unchaste and unclean men and women—

and sorcerers

Persons who profess to have communications with the dead necromancers, spiritualists, and all people of that sort—

and idolaters

That is, all who love anyone or anything better than God—

And all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

That is the death that never dies, the death which is far more to be dreaded than the death of the body.

9. *And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.*

John had already caught a glimpse of "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven;" and now this angelic messenger bids him come nearer, and look more closely into this mysterious and glorious city "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

10, 11. *And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;*

But what the glory of God may be, what mortal mind can imagine. All the imagery which the Apostle uses must fall far short of that simple expression, "Having the glory of God." That glory is to be upon the Church, and upon every individual member of it. The glory of every believer shall be nothing less than the glory of God.

12, 13. *And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gate twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates.*

God's Church glorified lieth open to all quarters of the infinitude of space, it is no prison-house of souls that dare not go beyond its borders, but a many-gated city, so that the blessed spirits there can fly whithersoever they will.

14. *And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

Not Peter only, but the whole of the twelve apostles shall have their names in the foundations of that holy city.

15, 16. *And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.*

It seems at first to be astounding that the height of a city should be equal to the length and the breadth of it; but if you have traveled in Italy, you must have seen many a city, perched upon a hill, which seemed to be even higher than it was broad or long, if you included the wall of the city, and the houses one above another right up to the loftiest minaret or tower. Yes, like a priceless square casket made all of costly jewels is this wondrous city, equally glorious whichever way you look at it: "The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal."

17, 18. *And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is of the angel. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.*

Such gold as never was, nor is, nor ever shall be on this earth until that time when God shall have purified it. Our gold is dull, opaque; light is blocked out by it. How many might see if it were not for the gold which blinds them, and hides the truth from them!

19, 20. *And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald, the fifth, sardonyx, the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolyte, the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.*

You know that the stones of which this holy city is built are living stones. You and I, if we are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be there, living stones prepared by living grace to have a name and a place in this living city. But what changes will have to be wrought in us before we are fit to be put among these precious jewels! We are like poor blocks of common-looking stone, but we do not know what we shall be like when we have been cut and polished on the great Lapidary's wheel. You may take a precious stone to a jeweller, and ask him what its value is, but he will say, "I cannot tell what it is worth until it has been cut and polished." That is how the Lord will prove the value of his living stones. If he will but work upon us by his grace, we cannot tell what he will make of us before he places us in the position he has appointed for us in the glorious city that rests upon these twelve precious foundations.

21. *And the twelve gates were twelve pearls;*

Whoever heard of such pearls? In what ocean but in the depth of God could such pearls be found? The twelve gates were twelve pearls.

every several gate was one of pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

Streets are used for fellowship. There men meet each other, and the fellowship of heaven will be golden, bright, clear, perfect. Here, when we meet with one another, we soon display and discover our mutual faults, but there they shall delight each other with their common beauty, all the beauties being borrowed from the Lamb, who is the glory of the place.

John had already said that "the city was pure gold like unto clear glass;" and now he says that "the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent

glass." We do not always get such a combination as this here below, gold, precious and pure, yet unstained with blood, and undimmed with the oppression of the poor—diaphanous gold, "as it were transparent glass."

22. *And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.*

It has a temple, that better state, that land of the Well-beloved, but not a material temple that John could see, yet he knew that it had a temple "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." Where they are is the holy place where all the tribes of the spiritual Israel shall be gathered at the last to "go no more out for ever." The Lord God Almighty "and the Lamb" have a glory far greater than Solomon's temple ever had and far greater even than that later temple which excelled even his in glory.

23. *And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.*

We have need of both the sun and the moon while we are in this world if it were not for the great central luminary, the solar system would cease to be, and this earth and the moon and all their sister planets would die out in darkness. But when the sun has been turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, it shall still be said of this holy city, the new Jerusalem, that the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. See how blessedly God and the Lamb are linked together, for Father and Son are truly one. It is pleasant also to reflect that he who is "the light of the world" is also the light of the world that is yet to be revealed: "the Lamb is the light thereof."

24. *And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it.*

This is the Church of the latter days; the beginning of the heavenly state, a true type of what the eternal glory of the saints will be. The Church will no longer, like her Lord, be despised and rejected of men; but the highest and greatest among men shall count it an honor and glory to be permitted to share its

blessings and triumphs.

The Church shall be the metropolis of the world; it shall be honored and esteemed among the nations of mankind. When men are godly, then will they reverence the abode of God, namely, the living Church, built up of living stones, upon the one foundation, Jesus Christ.

25. *And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day:*

Shut gates signify war; open gates mean peace. There shall be no more fear of war, no Gog and Magog to gather together to battle, no Armageddon to be dreaded by the glorified Church of Christ, which shall be in perfect peace for ever.

for there shall be no night there.

The saints will then be able to bear that eternal noontide for the sun shall not smite them by day; and they will have no need of the night which is now so necessary for resting our wearied bodies and minds, so “there shall be no night there.” There will also be no night of sorrow, no night of sin, no night of death in that blest land of light.

26, 27. *And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.*

Into this holy city, the graceless, the Christless, the faithless shall never come. Here, we have a mixture of light and darkness; but, in those better days, it shall be all light, and the darkness shall have fled far away for ever.

Revelation 22

1. *And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.*

Here again we have God and the Lamb uniting in giving that “water of life” which flows down to us by God’s grace through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God.

2. *In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruit, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

When Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, he was cut out of Eden, lest he should also eat of the tree of life; but our new “tree of life” yields us both medicine and food. Blessed are they that eat of it; they shall find a divine variety of mercies: “twelve manner of fruits.” They shall find a constant succession of blessings: “and yielded her fruit every month.” And there shall be an ever-present power of healing: “the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”

3. *And there shall be no more curse:*

The curse shall be taken from the soft on which it fell obliquely when God said to Adam, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake.” There shall be no curse upon man’s body; there shall be nothing but blessing. Blessing shall swallow up the cursing, and God shall be manifest everywhere.

3. *But the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his*

servants shalt serve him:

That is heaven to me, for here we sometimes are unable to serve him as we would. We are distracted, worried, carried away from holy service by multitudes of cares, but there his servants shall serve him.

4. *And they shall see his face:*

What a happy blending—service and communion—the hands busy, but the eves ravished with the wondrous sight of the face of God! Thou shalt see his face. If any of us could see the face of God on earth, no doubt we should die. The vision would be too bright for us. When one heard this. one of the greatest saints, he said, “Then let me see it and die,” and I do not wonder that he said so, for the sight of God, even should we die here, must still be perpetual, and it would make us live again.

and his name shall be in their foreheads,

Their faces made like God’s face, then—his name, his character, reflected on their brows—is not this worth having? 5. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light; and they shall reign for ever and They themselves shall be kings. They shall reign for ever and ever.

5. *And there shall be no night there;*

Here, there are nights of ignorance, of sorrow, of sin, and of fear; but “there shall be no night there.”

and they need no candles, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light:

He puts aside the use of means. While we are here, we need candles and suns. It seems curious, does it not, to put candles and suns in the same sentence? “They need no candle, neither light of the sun.” But, after all, compared with God,

candles and suns are very much the same thing. Great lights and little lights are all limited, all less than nothing, in comparison with the boundless, infinite God, who is light, and the source of all light that exists in heaven above, or on the earth beneath.

and they shall reign for ever and ever.

It must be a wonderful city in which every inhabitant is a king; and not a dethroned king either, for "they shall reign." Every redeemed one in heaven has also an everlasting kingdom; "They shall reign for ever and ever." I hope our friends who are always cutting down the meaning of the word "everlasting" will be good enough at least to let us have an everlasting heaven; whether they do so, or not, we believe that the saints shall reign "for ever and ever."

6–9. *And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the saying of the prophecy of this book. And I John saw these thing, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.*

John made a mistake; he mistook the messenger for the Master, and I am not surprised that he did so, for the heavenly beings are like their Lord when they see him as he is. John was quickly set right, and his error was soon corrected. He was bidden to pay no kind of homage to one who however bright and holy, was only his fellow-servant. No worship of angels, no worship of angelic men, must be tolerated among us. "Worship God," is the command to us as it was to John.

10. *And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.*

There was no need to seal the prophecy, as though it only related to those who

would live in distant ages: “The time is at hand.”

11. *He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.*

This is what will be said when Christ comes to judgment, when we get into that future state. Today the voice of Jesus says, “Repent, Repent Repent;” but once cross the narrow stream of death, and pass out of the dispensation of mercy, and then character is fixed, and fixed for ever.

12. *And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*

There will be no change possible when Christ comes as the Judge of all mankind. If you are filthy then, you will be filthy for ever; if you are holy then, you will be holy for ever. The delusion of universal salvation must be banished from the minds of all who believe the Word of God.

13–15. *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may deter in through the gates into the city. For without are dogs,*

Men of a quarrelsome and filthy spirit.

and sorcerers,

Such as pretend to have dealings with spirits, and who intermeddle with the mysterious things of the unknown world.

and whoremongers,

All such as indulge their evil passions.

and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

Whether it be a lie about things on earth or things in heaven, a falsehood spoken or a false doctrine taught.

16, 17. *I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*

This "Come" seems to sound both ways—from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven. Christ saith to us, "Come," and we cry to him, "Come." Oh, that sinners would be obedient to the divine "Come," and "take the water of life freely;" for then would the second coming of Christ be full of joy to them, and not a matter of dread.

18. *For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:*

The Book is finished. Not another line of inspiration may any man dare to put to it, on peril that God shall add to him every plague of which the Book speaks.

19. *And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

The Book is perfect. You cannot take a line from it without spoiling it if you were to out from it a solitary text, it would be misused, and the Book should be marred. You would do this at your peril, for God threatens to take away out of the Book of life the name of anyone who takes anything from "the words of the book of this prophecy."

20. *He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen.*

Even so come, Lord Jesus. All those centuries ago, Jesus said, “I am coming quickly;” how much nearer his coming must be, and how earnestly we too should cry, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

21. *The grace of our lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

The Old Testament ended with a curse, the New Testament ends with benediction. Oh, that we might all have a share of it.