Discovering Christ
In
The Gospel Of Luke

Donald S. Fortner

Volume 2
Introduction

I am not all surprised that my dear and longtime friend Don Fortner would be Discovering Christ in Luke. He seeks to discover Christ in every Biblical passage he reads!

But should not we all? We should indeed if we remember that it is written of our Lord and Savior Himself: “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). And did He not exhort men to “Search the scriptures; ... they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

The author of the present volume has already written Discovering Christ in ... Genesis, Ruth, Song of Solomon, Galatians, Matthew, Hebrews, Revelation, and a general survey of each book in the Old and New Testaments titled Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures. I assume he intends, God willing, to present his discoveries of Christ in every book of the Bible. If Christ is willing to permit him to complete that task, I will be grateful.

Don has, in the present book, expounded every passage in Luke’s gospel, and discovered Christ in every one of them, and clearly sets Him forth for us to behold.

This book is Christ-centered. By that I mean its contents befit its title. If you wish to see Christ set forth in Luke’s gospel, read this book! Don proves from Luke’s gospel that Christ is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah/Christ. And he sets forth this Christ as the sovereign Lord of all, the only Savior of His people, the gospel to believe, the teacher to heed, the example to follow, and many other things Christ is herein discovered to be.

This book is evangelistic. Its author expounds the Gospel of Luke. And he writes as a gospel preacher endeavoring to present Christ to sinners in need of Him. And he exhorts sinners to come to the discovered Christ.
This book is pastoral. Its author writes as a shepherd of sheep deeply concerned for the souls of his readers and desiring to be clearly understood by every one of them. The youngest babe in Christ and the eldest father and mother in Him should greatly profit from this book.

This book is to-the-point. Its author does not dignify errant views of the passages he expounds, nor chase rabbits while pursuing Christ. The fact that this to-the-point book is arguably voluminous only demonstrates that, when discovering Christ, many points are to be presented.

This book is both doctrinal and practical. We expect Luke’s gospel to be doctrinal, for he identifies its contents as “those things which are most surely believed among us” (1:1). Don in this book ably sets forth the doctrine of every passage in Luke’s gospel – and Christ is discovered to be that doctrine! But more than that, he dutifully sets forth how our lives should conform to that doctrine – and Christ is discovered to be the exemplar. He does not write as a doctrinaire interested in merely dispersing knowledge to you. Nor does he write as a moralist interested in merely improving your ethics. Rather, he writes in the hope of teaching you regarding Christ and in the hope that you will come to Christ and practice what you have learned of Christ.

This book is successful in its quest. Its author has truly discovered Christ in the Gospel of Luke.

And the discovered Christ is glorious!

Daniel E. Parks
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5. Sins are forgiven by Jesus Christ: Perhaps there are no sweeter, kinder words spoken to a sinner than those of the Master to that poor soul who crept into the home of Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7:48-50 “Thy sins are forgiven ... go in peace.” Do you see this fact? Do you know peace with God and the forgiveness of sins? That Jesus Christ forgives sins was a thing most surely believed.

6. Freedom from the law: Don Fortner asks, “Have you noticed how often the Lord performed miracles on the Sabbath day?” Luke declares that since the coming of Christ the law and prophets, typified in the presence of Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration, have been superseded by the gospel (Luke 16:16). Now the gospel brings righteousness without the law. The heavenly voice declaring, “This is my beloved Son: hear him” (Luke 9:35, 23:47). Works righteousness will never satisfy God or comfort a guilty soul, a thing most surely believed amongst us.

7. The covenantal responsibilities of Christ the God-man: Luke clearly shows that the early church believed that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into the world as a man to accomplish a definite task and deliver a particular people. “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Now either Christ successfully achieved this or he did not. If he did not he is not God. If he did then all the elect, whom he undertook to save must certainly be saved. His success is a thing most surely believed amongst us.

8. Substitutionary atonement: one of the most striking pictures of substitution in the whole of scripture is given in the gospel accounts of the Lord’s trial and the release of the
murderer, Barabbas. One is a guilty rebel, one the innocent, holy Son of God. The innocent is slain while the guilty goes free. Luke emphasises the substitutionary aspect of Christ’s death when he relates that the bread of the Lord’s supper, being emblematic of his body, “is given for you”, and the cup, “my blood which is shed for you”. A thing most surely believed amongst us.

9. Risen, ascended, returning Christ: He is not here, but is risen (Luke 24:6). He was parted from them and carried up into heaven (Luke 24:51). 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 (Acts 1:11). It is a thing most surely believed amongst us.

10. Christ in all the scriptures: all scripture speaks of Christ. Why should we be hesitant to believe this when the Lord himself taught it to be so. This, and the fact that Christ was alive, was the lesson of the walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:25-27) and the message of the upper room when the doors were locked and Christ stood in the midst (Luke 24:44,45). Law? It speaks of Christ. Prophecy? It speaks of Christ. The Genesis creation? It speaks of Christ. Israel’s wilderness journey? Christ. Kings? Christ. Judges? Christ. Psalms? Christ. Oh, that the Lord would open our eyes, too, to see Him in every place.

Here is a final thought. Luke speaks often of faith. He noted, and reported how frequently the Lord remarked upon faith in the approaches made to him by needy sinners, coming to him for healing and help. Luke mentions the faith of the four friends who brought the lame man to Christ, the centurion whose servant was sick, the dear woman who anointed his head with ointment and washed his feet with her tears, the woman with the issue of blood, the leper who gave thanks, the blind man near Jericho who received his sight. All these had their needs and more, met by the Lord Jesus Christ. They exhibited true faith, the gift of God’s grace, by which all men and women must come
to Jesus Christ. It is this faith that opens the understanding and teaches us the things most surely believed amongst us.

This then is the teaching of the Lord, the doctrine of the apostles, and these testimonies from Luke, the things which are most surely believed among us. May the Lord grant us faith to believe, and grace to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, that we might know the certainty of those things wherein we have been instructed.

It is my pleasure to endorse and recommend this excellent work from my friend Don Fortner. I am delighted he has now added to his commentaries on Matthew and Mark with these two fine volumes on Luke’s Gospel. It is my earnest desire and confident assertion that you will discover the Lord Jesus Christ in the following pages.

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Egglesburn Baptist Church
Chapter 1

“There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. 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” (Luke 13:1-5).

A Word From Our God About Human Tragedy

On April 19, 1995 Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols bombed the federal building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, indiscriminately murdering 168 people. Our nation was shocked. Just a few days after that, my wife and I were in Oklahoma City. I drove by the site of the bombing. I cannot describe the sense of numbness, rage, and frustration I felt as I reflected upon the cowardly act of those murderers and their crime against our nation. Even more than that, I was (and still am) filled with hurt for those families so devastated by the crime.

On April 20, 1999, two teenage boys walked into Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado and murdered twelve other students and a teacher. Again, our nation was shocked.

On September 11, 2001, our nation suffered the mass murder
of 3000 people. Across the United States, citizens watched in horror as cowardly terrorists in hijacked planes crashed into the Pentagon, World Trade Center, and a field in Pennsylvania. What pain the families of those who died in that assault of religious maniacs must live with for the rest of their lives!

Added to the pain caused by such senseless slaughters is the insinuation by many that these acts of inexplicable human cruelty were also acts of divine judgment upon those who died, as though they were sinners above the rest of us.

Not only are such events as these, which are so much on our minds as a nation, so alarming that they make our blood boil, they are horrors that so astound the mind that (try as we may) we have no ability to explain them. The sudden death which has fallen on the sons of men baffles human reason. We have, in recent years, almost come to expect another report of such barbaric deeds every time we turn on the radio or the television or open a newspaper.

Yet, we must not imagine that such things are new. We must not imagine, as many do, that these things are the inevitable consequences of our racially and culturally diverse society, or that they are events beyond the reach of divine wisdom and the control of divine providence.

Luke 13:1-5 tells us otherwise. The Galileans, like those in the terrorist attack of 9/11, were slaughtered by the senseless rage of a cruel man with the power, money, and the means to commit mass murder. Remember those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell were suddenly ushered out into eternity by the crushing weight of a falling tower.

These events may seem much less significant to us; but you can be certain they were not less significant to the families who lost their loved ones, than the events in Oklahoma, Colorado, and New York. These things are written in the Book of God for us that we may learn to walk with our God in the face of woe. Let us never imagine that God’s providence has become lax.
Sudden death is a part of life in this sin cursed earth. There always have been and always will be (for as long as the earth shall stand) such tragedies for men to face. As God’s children in this world, in the face of such events that shake our society to its very foundations, we must not be shaken, or even appear to be shaken. Our God is still on his throne. Let us, therefore, walk through this world of woe, even through this valley of the shadow of death confident and free of fear. God has not given up the reins of the universe. He has not taken off his hand from the helm of the ship. He is still in total control of all things, at all times, in all places. I want grace to trust him and honour him. Don’t you? This is his promise to those who do: “his soul shall dwell at ease” (Psalm 25:13).

It matters not who or what the instrument may be (Timothy McVeigh, Terry Nichols, street thugs, or Islamic thugs), that which takes men, women, and children out of this world is the hand of our God. It is God and God alone who kills and makes alive as he will. Sometimes he does so in such sudden, glaring displays that the whole world is shocked by his work.

A Word Of Caution
First, I want to give you a word of caution. We must never assume, as self-righteous men always do, that those who experience great tragedy and suffer great loss are being punished for their sins, as though they were greater sinners than we are. Such arrogant, self-righteous assumptions are as inexcusable as the deeds of wicked men, by whom such acts of terror are executed. I say to you, as our Master did to those who made such a proud assumption, “Suppose ye that those who have suffered such tragedies are sinners above all the rest of us, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

Without question, God does judge men for sin, visiting the iniquities of men upon them, their families and their nation.
Without question, ours is a nation and a generation under the judgment of God, judgment we have heaped upon ourselves by wilful rebellion. But it is not within the realm of our ability to know when or for whom sudden death comes by divine judgment.

Often God brings death to his people suddenly, unexpectedly as an act of great mercy and grace.

“The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness” (Isaiah 57:1, 2).

For the believer, death is never an act of divine judgment, an act of God’s anger. The believer’s death is always precious in the sight of the Lord. It is totally irrelevant how I die, where I die, when I die, or what the instrument of my death may be. The only thing that matters is that I die “in the Lord” redeemed, forgiven, justified, and accepted. “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15). Everything about the prospect of death is, for God’s elect, joyful (John 14:1-3; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Revelation 14:13).

When I have breathed my final breath
And dropped this robe of flesh in death,
When my appointed work is done
And my allotted time is gone,
Don’t stand around my grave and cry.
I’ll not be there. I did not die.

My Saviour came to call me home,
And I with him to heav’n have gone!
Now I am free from sin and pain;
And with the glorified I reign!
Don’t stand around my grave and cry.
I’m glorified! I did not die!

Seated with Jesus on his throne,
Glorified by what he has done,
I am a trophy of his grace.
Rejoicing, I behold his face.
Don’t stand around my grave and cry.
I am with Christ! I did not die!

My body lies beneath the clay,
Until the resurrection day.
In that day when Christ comes again,
Body and soul unite again!
Don’t stand around my grave and cry.
Rejoice with me! I did not die!

A Word Of Warning
Next, our Saviour gives us this word of warning: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”! You and I shall soon be cut off from the earth and ushered into eternity. Are you prepared to die? Am I? There is but one way for you and me to be prepared to die, to meet God in judgment. We must repent. Should you ask me, “What is repentance?” I would answer briefly that true repentance involves at least these three things: Holy Spirit conviction (John 16:8-11), faith in Christ (Romans 10:9, 10), and turning to God (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10; Philippians 3:3-14).

But we must never imagine, as all the deluded will-worshipers of this world universally assert, that repentance is an act of man’s imaginary “free will”, by which he wins God’s favour. Nothing could be further from the truth. The repentance spoken of by our Lord Jesus Christ, the repentance taught throughout the Word of God, is the work and gift of God wrought in chosen, redeemed, called sinners by his omnipotent,
effectual, saving operations of grace. All the persons of the Godhead are engaged in the gracious work of creating repentance in his chosen. God the Father pledged himself to give it, (Ezekiel 36:24-27). God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, has been “exalted as a Prince and a Saviour for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). And God the Holy Ghost is the “spirit of grace and supplication” poured out upon every redeemed sinner at the appointed time of love, causing every heaven born soul to “look unto him whom they have pierced, and mourn” (Zechariah 12:10).

Repentance is not a condition qualifying sinners for grace, but an evidence of grace bestowed. It is not the cause, but the effect. Unless the Lord God works this work in us, enabling us and effectually causing us to turn to him, just like those described here by Luke, “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”!
“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. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? 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” (Luke 13:6-9).

The Parable Of The Barren Fig Tree

If we would understand this parable correctly, it must be read in the context of verses 1-5. Read in its context, it is obvious that this parable was addressed by our Lord to the Jewish nation. God gave the Jewish people great privileges and advantages, by which they should have known and served him, by which they should have known and believed the Lord Jesus Christ. They
and they alone had all the privileges of divine revelation. They professed to be the people of God. But the very things that should have been their salvation became their ruin, their religion! Because they refused God’s revelation, the Lord God cut them down in judgment and cast them off (Romans 11).

Year after year, for three years, the Lord Jesus walked among them, showed himself by miracle after miracle, told them plainly who he is, and taught in their temple and synagogues. Yet, they despised him, rejected him, and refused to believe him. At last, he left them to themselves, utterly desolate (Matthew 23:37, 38).

**Addressed To Us**

It is a grave mistake to imagine, as many do, that this is the end of our Lord’s purpose in this parable. This parable is specifically addressed to you and me. Its intent is the awakening of all who enjoy the means of grace and the privilege of hearing the gospel, professing to be his people. May God give us grace to hear the parable as though it had just come from our Lord’s lips and was spoken directly to us. C. H. Spurgeon wrote, “The parable is so simple that it needs no explanation, and therefore our Lord Jesus has not given any.”

**God’s Vineyard**

The gospel church is God’s garden and vineyard. That is the picture the Lord God gives of his church and kingdom by the prophet Isaiah.

“No will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah,
judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry” (Isaiah 5:1-7).

Because the Lord God has given us the privilege of sitting under the sound of the gospel, it is our responsibility to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20-6:1). Yet, many who hear the gospel faithfully preached to them are yet without fruit toward God. You will notice in the parable that the man who owned the vineyard looked for fruit (singular) on the fig tree, not fruits (plural).

The fruit God looks for in men is faith in Christ, nothing else (Acts 16:31; Mark 16:16; John 3:16-19, 36; Romans 10:9-13). This fruit is not the produce of man’s imaginary free will, but the fruit of God’s free grace in Christ, the fruit of the Spirit, the gift and operation of God the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Philippians 1:29; Colossians 2:12).

Many there are who hear the gospel and even profess faith in Christ, but make for themselves a refuge of lies that will soon fall upon them and crush them down into hell. Professing they believe on the Lord Jesus, they look to their baptism, their church membership, their good works, the good opinion of others about them, their knowledge, or their religious experience to give them peace and hope before God. Soon, that refuge of lies will be swept away (Isaiah 28:14-20). Judgment is God’s
strange work (Isaiah 28:21); but he will perform it. In the eyes of proud men, it may appear to be a strange act for the God of all grace; but it will be the act of God that casts unbelieving sinners headlong into eternal hell.

**A Set Time**

There is a period of time set and determined by God beyond which he will not tolerate the insult of your obstinate unbelief. “Behold today is the day of salvation”! Many seek to avoid every thought of personal responsibility before God. Many there are who imagine that the assertion of man’s responsibility to believe the gospel is a repudiation of divine sovereignty. But the scriptures are crystal clear in this matter. If you perish in unbelief, all the blame is yours. If you are saved, all the praise is God’s. Unbelief is man’s work. The gift of faith is God’s work.

Is it possible for a man or women to so wilfully and persistently rebel against God and deny the claims of Christ in the gospel that God will refuse to be gracious to them? Is it possible for men and women to sin away the day of grace, while they still go on living in this world? That is precisely the message of this parable.

Listen to what God himself says about the matter. God says to you and me, “Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.” Surely, we cannot mistake the meaning of those words. Anyone in all the world who, hearing the gospel of Christ, repents and believes shall be saved. If you will turn to him, if you will call upon him, if you will believe him, Christ will save you. But if you refuse to hear and believe God, be warned. God will not take it lightly. The Lord God says …

“Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hands and no man regarded; but ye have set at naught all my counsels and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; When your fear
cometh as a desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways and be filled with their own devices ... But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil” (Proverbs 1:23-33).

We have God’s own word for it. If we obey his call in the gospel, he will save us. If we despise his calls, if we persistently stop our ears to the voice of God in the gospel, he will pass upon us an irreversible sentence of eternal ruin, even while we live upon the earth. And when he throws the impenitent soul into hell, the wicked will forever eat of the fruit of their own ways. They will at last get what they asked for when they said “I want nothing to do with Christ.”

There are many ways in which men and women are called and warned by God. God calls all men to himself in creation. “For the invisible things 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” (Romans 1:20). God’s being, power, and wisdom are plainly revealed to all men in creation’s handiwork.

No one can honestly deny that fact. God calls all men to himself by conscience as well. “The law is written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness” (Romans 2:14, 15). Your conscience is God’s witness of himself in your soul.

God warns all men of judgment to come by his acts of providence. Every time you see pictures of starving children in a famine torn land, every time you get sick, every time you have an automobile accident or a close brush with death, every time you visit a hospital or a funeral parlour, God is speaking to you by his acts of providence. He is saying to you, “It is appointed
unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). He is saying to you, Sinner, “prepare to meet thy God” (Amos 4:12).

And God calls men and women to faith in Christ and warns them of his justice and sure judgment to come by the preaching of the gospel. He sends his servants into the world with this great commission: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15, 16). If you obey God’s call and trust the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall be saved. If you refuse, you shall be damned. “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart” (Hebrews 3:7, 8).

Yet, the Word of God makes it clear that there are many who can and do refuse God’s gracious warnings and earnest calls to repentance. They wilfully sin against the light God has given them, harden their hearts, and refuse to hear his voice. And, when they do, God shuts the door of mercy against them! Men and women were still alive when God shut the door of the ark. And I dare say that there are many walking on earth today against whom God has shut the door of salvation and grace. For them, the day of grace is gone. They cannot be saved. They must perish. God help you. Be wise. Do not trifle with the gospel (Luke 13:24, 25; Jeremiah 7:16; Hosea 4:17; Matthew 13:12-16; 2 Corinthians 2:15-17).

**Judgment Sure**

The judgment of God is sure. Barren, fruitless souls are not only useless themselves, they are a hindrance to others. They cumber the ground, spoil the soil and, like the Pharisees, not only refuse to enter the strait gate, but prevent others from entering.

Faithful pastors, faithful gospel preachers, earnestly intercede with God, labouring earnestly for the souls of men and seeking God’s mercy on their behalf, that he might spare even
the barren soul that deserves to be cut down (v. 8; Joel 2:17; Romans 9:3; 10:1); but you must believe. You must trust the Lord Jesus Christ. The only thing that will save you from the axe of divine justice is that the God of all grace may so work in you by his Spirit that he brings forth in you, by the new creation of grace, the fruit of faith in Christ. Yes, this faith is the gift and work and operation of God the Holy Spirit; but this faith is your responsibility. You must believe on the Son of God. If you believe, salvation is yours.

Every soul without the fruit of faith toward God, like the barren fig tree, shall be destroyed. There is a law in the Book of Deuteronomy that relates to this. The barren, fruitless tree is fit for nothing but fire. You can only use a fig tree for two things: food or fuel. It is good for nothing else (Deuteronomy 20:19, 20). Whether you believe or believe not, whether you are saved or damned, our God does well, and we will acquiesce in his goodness (Romans 3:3, 4). God’s purpose will be accomplished. God’s elect will be saved. God’s glory will be manifest. And God’s justice will be vindicated.
Chapter 3

“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. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. 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” (Luke 13:10-17).

Cured At Last!

Our Lord’s miracles were intended to be types of his mercy and grace, confirming his claims as the Messiah, the Deliverer of Israel, the Son of God, our Redeemer and our King. When he
healed the ailments of men’s bodies, he was showing that he has power to cure the maladies of our souls. When he raised the dead, he was showing us that he, who is the resurrection and the life, has power to give spiritual, eternal life to those who are dead in trespasses and sins. When he multiplied the loaves and fishes, gathered fish into the empty nets of his toiling disciples, and caused a coin to be found in the mouth of a fish, he was teaching us that he has the power to provide our every need in this world. And when he spoke peace to the troubled sea and walked across the water to his disciples, he was teaching us that he who rules the world rules the storms of our lives, and when our souls are in trouble, he will come to us to comfort us.

Whenever we read of miracles performed by our Lord Jesus Christ, the believing heart should always see in the miracle a message of mercy. Our Lord, by leaving us the record of these things, is saying to us, “As I have worked glorious things upon the earth in the days of my flesh, I will surely work even more glorious things for you in my exaltation.”

As our Lord Jesus Christ met this poor woman in the synagogue and raised her up from her long and painful infirmity, he now meets sinners in the assembly of his saints and, by his almighty grace, raises those who are bowed down. His name is Jehovah-Rapha. He says, “I am the Lord that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26). I hold this woman before you, whose name I do not know, as an example of what the Lord Jesus Christ can do, and in every age and place, does for poor, needy sinners such as we are.

**Her Condition**

First, the Holy Spirit calls our attention to this woman’s condition. “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 … 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?” (vv. 11, 16).

On the Sabbath day the Lord Jesus could always be found in the synagogue, or in the temple teaching. He was in his element in the house of God. And he was most happy when he was declaring to men the things of God. In order to confirm the doctrine he taught and to illustrate it, he performed this great miracle of mercy. There is no other case exactly like it mentioned in the scriptures. Therefore, Luke calls our attention to it with the word, “Behold”!

We are not told precisely what was wrong with this woman, only that she was “bowed together”, that her condition was caused by Satan binding her, that she had been bowed together for 18 years, and that, “she could in no wise lift herself up.” She was very sick; and her infirmity was not only physical, but spiritual as well. Her outward appearance was an index of her inward torment. The appearance of her body was a picture of her soul. She was bowed together. Commenting on this passage, Spurgeon wrote, “Spiritual deformity assumes many forms, and each form is painful to look upon.”

The next time you go to the house of God, try to picture in your mind what the assembly might look like if every person present appeared outwardly to be what he is inwardly, as this woman did. Suppose that your physical appearance were a reflection of your inward state. The place would be truly pitiful to look upon. Over against the wall you might see a dead corpse. On the other side you might look with shock upon a poor leper. In another place you might see a paralyzed man with trembling faith. Sitting on one side of you might be a woman with fits of passion and despair, on the other side a man with flashes of fever and chills, and behind you a person with a convulsing heart, torn between heaven and earth.

Every gospel church might rightly be called “Bethel” (House of God) and “Bethesda” (House of Mercy, or House of Healing).
Assembled together God’s elect are a multitude of sick folk, poor, lame, broken, halt, maimed, and impotent. But in the house of God the Lord Jesus is in our midst. He is present in mercy to relieve the miseries of his chosen.

This poor woman in our text was probably unnoticed in the crowd. Being bowed together, she was dwarfed in size. It appears she regularly attended the synagogue. So the people there had become hardened to her condition. They paid her no attention. But the Son of God saw her, had compassion on her and healed her. Here she is held up as an example of grace.

This woman’s condition is a picture of every lost sinner. She was bowed together (Ecclesiastes 7:29). Blessed is the person who is bowed together in heart by reason of sin! She had been in this horrible deformity for a long, long time. Her misery was the work of Satan. And “she could in no wise lift herself up” (Jeremiah 13:23). She was a prisoner in her own body, a prisoner of sickness, but a prisoner of hope. Though she could not lift herself up, she was in the presence of One who could lift her up. And she had hope because he had lifted up many before her.

The leper (Luke 5:12, 13).
The paralyzed man (Luke 5:18-26).
The unclean multitudes (Luke 6:18, 19).
The centurion’s servant (Luke 7:1-10).
The widow’s son (Luke 7:11-17).
The demon possessed women (Luke 8:2, 3).
The woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8:43-48).
The ruler of the synagogue’s daughter (Luke 8:49-56).
As many as had need of healing (Luke 9:11).
This woman may have reasoned in her own mind, “If this Man, who has healed so many others, is pleased to do so, he can heal me too”! I am not certain about what she thought, but I tell you this with certainty: The Lord Jesus is able to save unto the uttermost all who come to God by him.

This woman’s condition is also a picture of many of God’s saints in this world. Without question, she was a believer, a saved woman, one who worshipped and served the true and living God, though she was sorely afflicted in the providence of God by the hand of Satan. We know she was a believer, a child of God because there is no mention here of her being forgiven. In other places, those healed were also forgiven. Apparently she was already forgiven. And our Lord tells us that she was “a daughter of Abraham”, an Israelite indeed.

Many of Abraham’s sons and daughters, many of God’s saints in this world are like this poor woman, “bowed together”, being afflicted and bound, in a sense, by Satan, having “a spirit of infirmity”. She had lost all her natural brightness and cheerfulness. No doubt, as a girl she was as smiling, sparkle-eyed and happy as anyone. But gradually there crept over her body an infirmity, which dragged her face downward, until at last she was bowed together. For eighteen long years, she had walked with her face toward the earth, as if she were looking for a grave. It had been eighteen years since she had seen the noonday sun, looked upon the singing birds in the trees, or beheld the star-lit sky.

She was bowed down with a spirit of infirmity. Are you like this poor soul, perpetually bowed down? Perhaps you remember happier days; but now you are bowed together in the melancholy spirit of infirmity. It has been a long, long time since you have been able to enter into sweet communion with God, behold the face of your beloved Saviour, or enjoy the peace, comfort, and joy of faith. In your inmost soul you pine for him whose presence is your happiness. William Cowper lamented;
Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the sweet refreshing view
Of Jesus in his Word?

What blissful hours I then enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill!

This woman, being bowed together, was bowed toward herself, bowed toward that which is most depressing. By some unexplainable mystery, depression breeds depression, grief multiplies, and a melancholy spirit is a legion in number. And the more you are bowed down to look to yourself, the more bowed down you will be.

We never find peace, assurance, and joy in Christ by looking to ourselves. Our Saviour never admonishes us to look to ourselves, but to him. Religion and the devil tell us to look inwardly to ourselves. The Lord Jesus commands us always and only to look to him (Isaiah 45:22; Hebrews 12:1, 2). Any religion that sets you looking to yourself is nothing but a snare of Satan.

Next, we are told that this poor soul “could in no wise lift up herself.” No need to blame her for her condition. One of her older sisters may have scolded her for her condition, when she began to stoop, saying, “Sister, you must not give in to your feelings. Straighten up, or you will become stooped and deformed.” What good advice some people can give!

This poor woman was bound by Satan. And when Satan binds the soul, it is as truly bound as when a man snares an eagle and binds it. This woman was bound to herself! All the advice,
counsel, and preaching in the world could not lift her up. And she could not lift herself up, though she wanted to do so with all her heart. Her freewill could not change her condition!

Worst of all, she had been bowed down for eighteen years. Eighteen years! That is a long time. Eighteen years of happiness fly by more swiftly than we are able to fathom. Eighteen years of happiness is a short span of time. But eighteen years of misery, eighteen years of pain, eighteen years of being bowed down, who can measure that? Eighteen long years, each year dragging twelve miserable months behind it, each month pulling four heavy weeks, each week loaded with seven gloomy days, and each day loaded down with twenty-four gruelling, painful, lonely hours! What grief! This woman had been in the bonds of the devil for eighteen years, bowed together!

Reader, are you like this poor woman? Have you been bowed down in spirit for a long, long time? Perhaps your inner despondency, your soul’s constant unrest is an affliction no one can understand. If you are such, take hope. This woman’s cure came in a moment. The chain, which it took Satan eighteen years to forge, the Son of God broke in an instant!

Do not forget that though she was in this condition for such a long, long time, all the while she was a child of Abraham. Her heart was right with God.

**Her Conduct**

Second, the Spirit of God shows us what this poor soul did. “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” (vv. 10, 11).

This poor woman, bowed as she was in body and in spirit, was in the house of prayer on the Sabbath day. It was while she was there that she found the liberty she craved in her soul. For eighteen years she had come to the house of God in excruciating
pain and gone home again in torment. But on this day, she was cured. Mercy was found in the house of prayer.

There was nothing about her life and nothing in her spiritual condition to give her comfort. And she could not lift herself up. But she could go to the house of God. She could worship God. Even in her misery she honoured God. And God always honours those who honour him. She came to the house of prayer, because everything she needed was to be found there. The Lord was there. His Word was there. His people were there. His instruction was to be found there. His mercy was to be found there. I can almost hear her singing Psalm 122, as she skipped and danced home that day!

This woman, who might have been reasonably excused for not attending the worship of God, made it her business to be in the house of God on the day of public worship. What is your excuse for neglecting it?

**Her Cure**

Third, the Holy Spirit tells us how the Lord Jesus healed this poor soul of her infirmity. “And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God” (vv. 12, 13). Look at how Luke describes this woman’s cure. She had been bound by Satan for eighteen years. Christ came to set her free. This is how he did it.

“When Jesus saw her, he called her to him.” When he called her, he spoke to her and spoke effectually, causing her disease to flee from her. “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.” Then “he laid his hands on her”, his almighty, tender, nail pierced hands! And, “immediately she was made straight.” Man can never make straight that which God has made crooked. But the Son of God can easily make straight what sin and Satan have made crooked. As soon as she was cured, she “glorified God”!
Shackled by a heavy burden
’Neath a load of guilt and shame
Then the hand of Jesus touched me
And now I am no longer the same.

He touched me, Oh, he touched me
And oh the joy that floods my soul
Something happened and now I know
He touched me and made me whole

Since I met the blessed Saviour
And since he cleansed and made me whole
I will never cease to praise him.
I’ll shout it while eternity roll.

Oh he touched me! Oh he touched me!
And oh what a joy that floods my soul!
Something happened and now I know,
He touched me and made me whole!

William J. Gaither

The Lord permitted Satan to afflict the child of his love for eighteen years, so that she might glorify him forever. Her deep sorrow, when it was over, made her song most sweet.

Her Conflict
No sooner was one trial over than another began. As soon as this woman was healed, she was involved in great conflict with a self-righteous, religious hypocrite. This man was upset because this woman was healed on the sabbath day! “And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come
and be healed, and not on the sabbath day” (v. 14).

The sabbath day was a day of rest. And now, for the first time in eighteen years, this poor soul was at rest. But this legalist could not stand it. Legalism is hard. The legalist is more concerned for laws, rules, customs, and days than he is for the needs of human beings. Legalism is haughty. The legalist is always proud and self-righteous. Legalism is hypocrisy. Every man who pretends to live by the law of God is a hypocrite. Legalists always lower the standard of the law, which is perfection, perfect holiness, perfect obedience. By lowering the law’s standard to themselves, they vainly imagine that they are holier than others.

Her Comfort
The Lord Jesus tenderly comforted his beloved child by three things: He answered her adversary (v. 15). He assured her of her acceptance (v. 16). And he graciously used her to be an instrument for the glory of God (v. 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” (13:15-17).

When our Lord gets done, all his enemies and ours shall forever be ashamed. In that great, eternal day all his people shall forever rejoice in the glorious things that have been done by him. And you and I, sinners saved by his grace, shall be named among those glorious things done by him, for which he shall be praised forever!
Chapter 4

“Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? 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. 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” (Luke 13:18-21).

Two Instructive Parables

In these four verses our Lord Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed and a leaven hidden in three measures of meal. Our Saviour was a great story teller. He constantly used parables, told stories to illustrate and enforce his doctrine. He never used spell-binding oratory, intellectual argument, philosophy, logic, or theological history to teach the gospel. He deliberately spoke in plain, simple language to clearly set forth and illustrate gospel truth. That is the kind of preaching that should be cultivated among God’s servants (1 Corinthians 2:3-5; Mark 4:33, 34).

When the Lord Jesus preached, he always preached in the plainest, simplest manner imaginable. He who is the embodiment of wisdom and knowledge never used complicated words and phrases. He never once referred to the original language, or even defined a word. He did not use words that
required definition. Instead, he told stories and illustrated the truths he taught by parables.

In contrast with today’s preaching, our Lord’s example of preaching speaks volumes. He preached in such a way that people understood what he preached. He never tried to impress his hearers with how smart a man he was or how much he knew. He did not display knowledge. He taught knowledge. There is a huge difference. Those who follow the Master’s example do not try to impress men. They instruct men.

Our Master taught with plainness and simplicity. He did not preach what he could not illustrate; and when he was finished, the people who heard him understood what he had said. Our Saviour taught with knowledge and understanding (Jeremiah 3:15). He knew exactly what they needed, and what they could bear, and taught them accordingly. The Son of God expounded all things to his disciples. He kept back nothing from them. He expounded to them all the Word of God. Faithful men follow his example.

The word “parable” is the same word that is translated proverb in other places. Solomon’s wise sayings and instructive similitudes are called proverbs, or parables, by which he taught us wisdom. “Behold, a greater than Solomon is here”! By his parables he teaches us wisdom. “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

Speaking in parables our Lord fulfilled the prophecy of the Old Testament scriptures (Psalm 78:2). And the matter, the subject, and the theme of these parables, Matthew tells us, are “things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world.” The gospel of Christ and the purposes of God toward the Gentile world were wrapped up in the Old Testament by the types and shadows of the law, which have now been fulfilled by Christ, in whom God has revealed himself and made known his grace.

The Master’s reason for speaking in parables is explained in
Matthew 13:9, 10. As the mighty, sovereign God of heaven and earth, he exercises his sovereign mercy, giving grace to whom he will, and making a clear distinction among men. To some he reveals his Word. From others he hides the meaning of his words. That is his prerogative as God (Matthew 11:25, 26; 20:15; Exodus 33:19).

In the two instructive parables of the mustard seed and the leaven our Saviour shows us what we may expect to be the result of gospel preaching throughout the ages of time.

**Mustard Seed**

First, let us learn the parable of the mustard seed.

“Then said he, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? 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” (vv. 18, 19).

Remember, parables are common, familiar earthly illustrations of spiritual, heavenly truths. In this case the parable is drawn from a commonly used proverbial expression during the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry. The parable of the grain of mustard seed is designed to teach us never to despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:6-10).

**Holy Scripture**

The first thing I want to show you from this parable is the veracity of holy scripture. Ignorant men who think themselves wise, reprobate men who think themselves spiritual, pass judgment upon the Word of God. They claim to be Christians, claim to be people of faith, and claim to honour Christ, while denying the veracity of the Bible. Not long ago, I heard a man in an interview with ABC News say, “I believe the Bible; but I don’t take it word for word.” A woman, in the same segment said, “I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God; but I do
not think you have to take it all literally.” Regrettably, those comments fairly well represent the opinions of most who profess to be Christians in our day.

In this day of spiritual darkness and perversion there is almost a universal abandonment of belief in the verbal, plenary inspiration of God’s holy, inerrant Word. Rejecting the veracity and consequently the authority of holy scripture, men and women everywhere are turning to necromancy, astrology, and sorcery for spiritual counsel and aid. Long ago John Hazelton wrote, “Satan assumes the garb of an angel of light and his deceptions in this disguise are deadly.”

“And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? (To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:19, 20).

Frequently, those who think they are smarter than God point to this parable to show that our Saviour was either ignorant or misinformed, because he spoke of the mustard seed as the smallest of all seeds and of the mustard plant as a tree. Those who make such judgments are ignorant and misinformed. When our Lord said that the mustard seed is “the smallest of all seeds in the earth, he was not talking about all seeds without exception, but all the seeds a man sows in his garden. Though we usually think of mustard plants as bushy, leafy plants, there is a variety of mustard that grows into a pretty good size tree-like plant, sort of like a banana tree in size. We must never allow men, with their imaginary proofs of inaccuracies in the Bible, to shake our faith in the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Faith
Second, the mustard seed was used by our Lord as an illustration of our faith in him. Though it is never mentioned in the Old
Testament, many varieties of mustard plants grew in abundance in and around Palestine. Some grew in the wild. Others were cultivated for various purposes. In the New Testament it is mentioned only by our Saviour. Twice he compares true faith to a grain of mustard seed (Matthew 17:14-21; Luke 17:3-6). Mustard seed is mentioned only five times in the Word of God. When it is used to illustrate faith, as in Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6, it teaches us four specific things about the character of true faith.

True, saving faith begins as a very small thing. A grain of mustard seed. The fact is, true believers always recognize that their faith is a small, very small thing. We often look upon our brothers and sisters in Christ as being men and women of great faith; but anyone who thinks he has great faith probably has no faith at all.

It is not the greatness of our faith, but the greatness of our God and Saviour, the Object of our faith, that gives it merit, power, and efficacy.

Far too many have faith in their faith, which is to say they have faith in themselves. We must never imagine that there is some mystical power to faith. The power of our faith is Christ, the Object of our faith. It is not our faith that moves the mountain of our sins or plucks up the sycamore tree of trouble; but the blood of Christ and the power of Christ, who is the Object of our faith. The question is not, “How much faith do I have?” but “What is the object of my faith?” Great faith in an idol is as useless as spitting in the wind; but faith, even as a grain of mustard seed, in the God of glory is mighty, effectual, saving faith.

With God, nothing is impossible; and therefore, “Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23).

Nothing can stand in the way of, hinder, or defeat that man and those people who, being called of God, believe him. It was
impossible for Egypt to destroy Israel, because Moses believed God. It was impossible for the Red Sea to stop the march of God’s elect, because Moses believed God. The walls of Jericho must fall. Joshua believed God. The land of Canaan must be possessed. Caleb believed God. The Philistine giant had to die, because David, defending the cause of God’s glory and his people, believed God. Jairus’ daughter had to live. He believed God. The centurion’s servant must rise. That centurion believed God. Our Saviour was not lying when he said, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” “If thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God.”

Yet, nothing is more abominably wretched than the paralyzing effect of unbelief. When the Lord Jesus came into his own land, among his own people, we read, “he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58). Just in proportion as we believe God, we experience his power and grace. Just in proportion as we believe him, we see his glory. Nothing is as costly as unbelief (Isaiah 48:16-19).

**The Church**

Third, the parable of the mustard seed illustrates the growth of God’s church and kingdom in this world. The purpose of the parable is to teach us to never despise the day of small things. But it is also intended to assure us of the certain growth and blessedness of Christ’s church and kingdom in this world.

Like faith in the heart, the church and kingdom of God in this world began as a very small thing. The expression, “as a grain of mustard seed”, was a common, proverbial saying among the Jews, referring to anything small and insignificant. As a rule, God’s works in the world are always looked upon by men as trivial, insignificant things. Certainly, that is the way it was with the Church of the New Testament.

Those who were chosen to be the foundational apostles of Christ’s kingdom were poor, unlettered fishermen. He who is the
Lord and Master of this Church, the King of this Kingdom, was a despised Nazarene, a crucified Jew. The doctrine proclaimed by this Church, and preached everywhere was the doctrine of grace, life, and eternal salvation by the merit and efficacy of a crucified Substitute. In the eyes of men nothing could have been less likely to be successful, nothing more despicable, nothing could have been more offensive. Yet, this was God’s work, God’s Church, and God’s Kingdom.

God’s thoughts are not our thoughts; and his ways are not our ways. God almost always does things exactly opposite of what we would, and of what we imagine he does. The gospel does not triumph all at once. The church and kingdom of God is not set up all at once, neither amongst us in the world, nor within us in our hearts.

The church of God sprang from a very small seed sown in the earth, a crucified Saviour (John 12:24). God’s works almost always begin in obscurity, with what appear to be insignificant things. The work of the gospel, the spread of God’s church and kingdom is a gradual thing. Like the grain of mustard seed sown in the ground, its growth is almost unobservable, but steady. As the full grown mustard seed is the greatest and largest of all herbs, so the church and kingdom of God shall, in the end of the world, be immeasurably great and large (Psalm 80:8-11). The number of God’s elect shall be ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. Untold millions and billions of people shall inhabit heaven’s glory with Christ!

Once planted, this Church and Kingdom grew into a great Kingdom. Our Lord’s parable here was prophetic. Again, he was telling his disciples not to despise the day of small things. Though it appeared a small, despicable thing, like the mustard seed, the Lord prophesied that his Church would become a great, large Kingdom. He said, “As the mustard plant grows to be the greatest of all herbs, so shall my church grow to be the greatest of all kingdoms.”
So it has come to pass. It began to grow on the day of Pentecost. Three thousand were born into his Kingdom on that day. The Church grew so rapidly that nothing can account for it except the finger of God. A few days after Pentecost, five thousand were added to the Church at once. Wherever God’s servants went preaching the gospel, it proved to be the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:14-17). Today, the Church of God is the greatest empire the world has ever known; and it is not done growing yet. God still employs the same means today as he did in the beginning for the building of his Church that is, gospel preaching (1 Corinthians 1:21-31; Matthew 16:18). In spite of all the predictions of wicked men, in spite of all the foes without and all the treachery within, the Church of God still progresses, the Kingdom of God still enlarges itself, the mustard plant still grows!

Believers
What is true of the Church is true of each member of it. The beginnings of grace in the life of a believer are very small; but where there is life there is growth; and those who are born of God are grown by God. The more they grow, the smaller they appear in their own eyes. Yet, when God is finished with us, we shall at last be transformed into the very likeness of Christ!

Influence
The fourth thing that is evident in this parable is this: The church and kingdom of God has a very ennobling, sanctifying influence upon the rest of the world. Though no one in the world knows it, and few in the Kingdom of God realize it, the Church and Kingdom of God has a profoundly sanctifying effect upon the rest of society. That is, at least in part, what is meant by the birds of the air flocking to and nesting in the mustard plant. The Church and Kingdom of God, like a great tree, provides shelter for the world and influences it for good. We have an example of
what I am talking about in 1 Corinthians 7:14, where God the Holy Spirit tells us that, “the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife by the husband.”

As in a home the unbelieving are sanctified by the believing in a moral sense, so in the world, the unbelieving are sanctified by the believing. Read your history books. Education did absolutely nothing to improve the moral condition of the Greek and Roman worlds. Plato and Aristotle made absolutely no impact upon society for moral good. That which has improved every society, every culture, every family, and every relationship under its influence is the gospel of Christ.

Mixed Multitude
Fifth, in this parable of the mustard seed, our Lord reminds us again that the church and kingdom of God in this world is a mixed multitude. The fowls of the air also represent the mixed multitude in the visible Church and Kingdom of God in this world. The visible Church has always been inhabited by both the clean and the unclean. There is no such thing as a perfect Church in this world. Every true Church has within its fold both goats and sheep. It is a nesting place for birds clean and birds unclean. It is a garden enclosed; but a garden with wheat and tares growing side by side. What are we to do about this? Nothing! Do not try to scare off the crows. If you do, you will drive away the red birds. Do not try to pull up the tares. You will pull up wheat every time. Never try to separate sheep from goats. We are not equipped for it. Only the Lord himself can distinguish the true from the false. It is his work to do the separating; and he will do it.

The Leaven
“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” (vv. 20, 21).
This parable is misinterpreted by many. We are often told that the leaven refers to the ever-increasing evil of the world. But our Lord is not talking about the world. He is talking about “the kingdom of heaven”. He is talking about his Church. The parable of the leaven is very much the same in meaning as the parable of the mustard seed. It teaches us that the gospel prevails by degrees and works like leaven in the hearts of God’s elect.

“A woman took leaven.” The woman, the weaker vessel, represents gospel preachers, who have the treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). The leaven was hidden in three measures of meal. The regenerate heart, like meal, is soft and pliable. Leaven will never work in corn, but only in ground meal. So the gospel has no effect upon the stony, unregenerate heart. It only works upon broken hearts that have been ground by the Holy Spirit in conviction.

Once the leaven is hidden in the dough, it works. So the word of God, hidden in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners by God the Holy Spirit, works and brings forth fruit. The change it works is gradual, but it works (Hebrews 4:12). God’s work is like the growth of the mustard seed and the spread of leaven; small and gradual in our eyes, almost unobservable. Let us never despise the day of small things. But when he gets done …

“Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the LORD unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts. Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD,
which run to and fro through the whole earth” (Zechariah 4:6-10).
Chapter 5

“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? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; 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. 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. 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. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last” (Luke 13:22-30).

“Are There Few That Be Saved?”

Multitudes there are who, like the Jews of old, have all the advantages and privileges of outward gospel ordinances and public worship, multitudes enjoy the practice of religion and a form of godliness, who never know the saving power of God’s
omnipotent mercy. Multitudes keep up the exercises of religion with great diligence, who know nothing of God’s salvation. They strive to enter into the kingdom of God; but it is in their own strength. They eat and drink in Christ’s presence; and many hear Christ and him crucified faithfully preached, who perish without him. Others, scattered among the nations of the world, who never had such privileges, upon hearing the gospel, have the Lord Jesus revealed in them and believe. Such is the discrimination of grace that the last are made first and the first are made last.

I am of the firm and ever deepening conviction that most religious people are lost. Most of the people I preach to in churches throughout this country and around the world are yet in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. It is not as easy as you might suppose to find one who truly knows the Lord Jesus Christ. There are few who trust Christ, few who are committed to Christ, few who are in love with the Lord Jesus Christ.

God’s elect, contrary to popular opinion, are not to be found in every church. It may well be true that there are few in any gospel church. In the last day multitudes, vast multitudes of religious men and women, who are absolutely sure they are saved, will hear the Son of God say, “Depart from me”, and shall be forever consigned to the torments of the damned (Matthew 7:21-23). They believed the truth about Christ. They professed faith in Christ. They preached in the name of Christ. They performed miracles in the name of Christ. They performed many wonderful works in the name of Christ. They had perfect peace, confidence, and assurance that they were saved, born of God, heirs of heaven, and eternal glory. But they were lost, without God, without Christ, without hope. Any honest man who reads those three verses in Matthew 7 must be compelled to ask himself, “Lord, is it I?” As John Newton put it in one of his hymns …
’Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord, or no,
Am I his or am I not?

It is a fact plainly revealed in holy scripture that the vast majority of those who profess faith in Christ and think that all is well with their immortal souls are lost, in the broad road of destruction, which leads to eternal ruin. Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ says to you and me, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” Let us make neither more nor less of this solemn exhortation than our Lord means by it. And the best way to determine what he means is to look into the context.

A Striking Question
The Lord Jesus was making his way toward Jerusalem where he would lay down his life for his people. There he would make atonement for our sins by suffering all the horrid wrath of God in our room and stead unto death, satisfying the justice of God for us. As he went his way to Calvary, he taught the gospel. One day, as he walked in the streets teaching the multitudes around him, obviously, someone thought of what the scriptures teach about divine election and concluded that since there were not many disciples following the Master, and God has only chosen some to be saved, there must be only a few who will be saved.

Satan commonly perverts precious, gospel doctrine into something hard in the minds of men, and takes that which ought to encourage sinners to trust Christ, and makes it a barrier before them. That seems to have been the case here. So one of those who walked with and heard the Lord Jesus raised this question: “Are there few that be saved?”
It is likely that this question was asked by a Jew, and that the two parables illustrating the smallness of the kingdom’s beginning suggested it to him. The Jews extended their exclusive spirit even to their ideas of a world to come, so that they believed none but their chosen race would behold its glories. The questioner wanted the Saviour to give his approval to this narrow Jewish spirit, or else to take a position which would subject him to the charge of being unpatriotic.

Whatever the man’s motive was in asking this question, the Lord Jesus answered his question with a very needful admonition: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (v. 24). What does it matter whether God’s elect are few or many, if you are not one of them? The Master answered this man’s question directly, urging him to make sure that he is in the number, however large or small it might be. Satan does not care if you discuss and debate the things of God twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week as long as you go on to hell without Christ. Multitudes go to hell talking about religion.

People like to poke fun at those of us who believe and preach the blessed, gospel doctrine of divine election, saying, “You folks believe that there are only a select few who will be saved.” Well, yes, that is what we believe. Our Lord Jesus Christ said plainly, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matthew 22:14). Those are the words of God himself. That settles the question.

I know that in the end God’s elect will be a multitude which no man can number, ten thousand time ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. Who can tell how many elect infants God has mercifully taken to glory in his acts of judgment upon their ungodly parents? Yet, at any one time, God’s elect in this world are few, very few, when compared with the multitudes who perish. In the days of Noah only Noah found grace in the
eyes of the Lord. Lot was the only person in Sodom whom God had chosen. Of the vast multitude who left Egypt, only two, Joshua and Caleb, entered the land of promise. The rest perished in unbelief. There were 851 prophets at Carmel, only Elijah knew God. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he said, “I and some few men with me” came to do the work (Nehemiah 2:12). Isaiah said that when the judgment of God came upon the earth, there would be “few men left” (Isaiah 2:6). A great multitude was carried away into Babylon; but when they came to Jeremiah in repentance, they said, “we are left but a few of many” (Jeremiah 42:2).

Our Lord Jesus said concerning the way of faith and life, “Few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). And in his parables Christ made it plain that there are “few that be saved” (Luke 13:20-25). At the last time, in that age of the church depicted by Sardis there will be only “a few names” found among the faithful (Revelation 3:4).

This is the teaching of holy scripture: Among the multitudes who wear the name of Christ, and profess to be his followers, there are only a few who are saved. The rest are perishing under the delusion of a false hope.

Hear the word of the Lord, and be warned. Are you among the many who are perishing; or are you among the few who are chosen, the few who trust Christ alone for eternal salvation? With the apostle Peter, I solemnly admonish you to give diligence to make your calling and election sure. Has Christ been revealed in you? Do you know the Son of God? Do you truly trust Christ alone as your Saviour? Is Jesus Christ your Lord and Master? If you will be honest, you can know whether or not you are among the few whom God has chosen. You can know your election. Paul told the Thessalonians plainly that he knew they were God’s elect for five reasons (1 Thessalonians 1:4-10). These are certain identifying marks of God’s elect.

God’s elect hear and receive the gospel in the power of the
Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:5). Being taught of God, they are assured of Divine truth.

God’s elect follow Christ (1 Thessalonians 1:3, 6). Like Christ, those who are truly born of God, believe God, serve God with patience, hope, and love, and walk before him in the joy of faith. Like their Master, the people of God persevere in the hour of trial. They follow him.

God’s elect are committed to Christ and to the gospel of his grace (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

God’s elect repent of their sins and turn to God with a true heart (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

God’s elect live in this world as men and women of expectation and hope, “waiting for his son” (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

If indeed you and I are among those who are elect of God, our hearts should be filled with gratitude, praise, and admiration for him (Romans 11:33-36). The only difference between the many who perish and the few who are chosen is the difference which grace has made (1 Corinthians 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-14). As for me, I gladly ascribe the whole of my salvation to God, who loved me freely with an everlasting love and saved me by his grace. “By the grace of God I am what I am.” I am chosen by grace, redeemed by grace, called by grace, given faith to believe by grace, preserved by grace, and free grace alone shall bring me safely into heaven’s eternal glory (Jude 24, 25).

Oh to grace, how great a debtor,
Daily I’m constrained to be!

A Sobering Exhortation

Then our Lord Jesus Christ gives us this very sobering exhortation: “Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (v. 24). The word “strive” means “to agonize, labour fervently, and fight” to
enter in at the strait gate. The word “strait” means “narrow, constricted, contracted, or close”. Here the Lord is showing us our responsibility. Our concern must not be what others may do, or even what may happen to others. Our responsibility is to seek the Lord ourselves, whether anyone else does or not.

The unbelief and indecision of others will be no excuse in the last day. We must never follow the multitudes. If we go to heaven alone, we must resolve by the grace of God to do so. If we follow Christ alone, we must be resolved to let all others perish if they will, but we will not perish with them. Whether we have many with us, or few, our responsibility is plain “Strive to enter in.”

We must not go on in our unbelief, saying, “I can do nothing until God draws me.” It is my responsibility to draw near to God. “Strive to enter in.” God’s election and my own inability have nothing to do with my responsibility. I must “strive to enter in.” “The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12).

A Solemn Warning
Then our Lord sets before us a very plain and solemn warning (vv. 25-30). “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, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are.” The long and short of that is this: There is a day coming when the forbearance of God shall come to an end. He declares, “My Spirit shall not always strive with man” (Genesis 6:5). You can make what you want of that. Men can argue and debate for the rest of their lives about whether that is sound doctrine or rank Arminianism. I really have no interests in their wrangling. My concern is for your soul. And I know this, there is a day appointed by God when the door of mercy, which has been open to you for so long, shall be shut.
There comes a time when men and women cannot be saved, even while they live they are dead (Proverbs 1:22-31; Hosea 4:17). “He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Proverbs 29:1). Our Lord is saying, “Strive to enter in now while you may, while the door is open before you, for the door will not always be open” (Jeremiah 7:13-16).

A Day Of Reckoning
Then our Lord assures us that there is a day of reckoning and righteous judgment coming.

“Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. 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. 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. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last” (Luke 13:26-30).

Many who think they are saved shall find themselves at last under the wrath of the Lamb (vv. 26-28). Their religious profession, their great experiences, their doctrinal knowledge, their mighty works will all be vanity.

All will see what is right when it is too late. Hell is a place where truth is known too late! But in that last day all believers shall receive the full reward of heaven and eternal glory (vv. 29, 30).

In this whole passage our Lord is making an illusion to the ancient marriage feasts, which were held at night. The house would be all lit up. And those who were admitted to the marriage feast would be in the light. Those who were excluded were in darkness outside, “outer darkness”. The guests entered
by a narrow wicket gate, at which the porter stood to prevent any uninvited people from rushing into the feast. When all who had been invited were in the house, the door was shut. It would not be opened to those who were without, no matter how much they knocked (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:2).

Come, humble sinner, in whose breast
A thousand thoughts revolve,
Come with your guilt and fear oppressed,
And make this last resolve

I’ll go to Jesus, though my sin
Hath like a mountain rose;
I know his courts I’ll enter in,
Whatever may oppose.

Prostrate I’ll lie before his throne,
And there my guilt confess;
I’ll tell him I’m a wretch undone,
Without his sovereign grace.

I’ll to the gracious King approach,
Whose sceptre pardon gives;
Perhaps he may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives!

Perhaps he will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there.

I can but perish if I go,
I am resolved to try;  
For if I stay away, I know,  
I must forever die.  

But, if I die with mercy sought,  
When I the King have tried,  
This were to die (Delightful thought!)  
As sinner never died.

Edmund Jones
Chapter 6

“And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last. The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest 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! 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” (Luke 13:30-35).

“Ye Would Not”

An Instructive Proverb
First, in verse 30 our Lord uses a proverb to describe the kingdom of God and the work of God. “And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”

What an instructive proverb this is! Do not fail to notice the context in which this proverb is given. Our Master is urging us to strive to enter into the strait gate (v. 24). He tells us that we must do so now, for the hour is soon coming when he will shut
the door, and none will be able to enter, though they long to do so. Then, he speaks of the Day of Judgment and eternity (vv. 25-29).

It is in this context that our Lord gives us this parable. “And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”

This proverb was literally fulfilled when the gospel was first preached, has been fulfilled throughout the ages, is being fulfilled now, and shall be fulfilled in eternity. The Jews who were first became last; and the Gentiles who were last became first.

But there is more here than simply the declaration of God’s method of grace in dealing with the Jews and with his elect among the Gentiles. In this proverb our Lord is teaching us something about God’s method of grace and who they are who are the objects of his eternal mercy, love, and grace, who they are whom he has chosen to save. Those who think they are and appear to be first in line for heaven will be last in the Day of Judgment. And those who think themselves to be and appear to be last in line for the grace of God will be first in the Day of Judgment. God’s elect are seldom those we would choose (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

Ah, Grace! Into unlikeliest hearts
It is thy boast to come;
The glory of thy light to find
In darkest spots a home.

Thy choice (O God of goodness!) then
I lovingly adore:
Oh, give me grace to keep Thy grace,
And grace to long for more.
A Blessed Fact
Second, in verses 31, 32 our Saviour sets before us a blessed fact that ought to constantly quieten and calm our hearts in the face of trouble.

No doubt, when the Pharisees heard what our Lord said about them being last in the Day of Judgment and of others going before them into the kingdom of God, they understood that he was talking about them. I rather suspect that he was looking them right in the eye when he said it. So they thought they could scare the Master into silence and get him to quit preaching. “The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee” (v. 31).

Perhaps Herod, the ruler of Galilee, who had beheaded John the Baptist, had let it be known that he was determined to kill our Saviour. But it may be that the Pharisees simply invented the report. (Never put anything past lost religious men, who are determined to justify themselves.) Whether the report was true or false, it was obviously the intent of these Pharisees to intimidate the Master; but their scheme backfired.

“And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected” (v. 32). Our Lord was not frightened by the Pharisees or by Herod, but there is more here than that.

In his reply to the Pharisees our Master simply stated, “My time to leave this world has not yet come. My work is not yet finished. Until that time comes, you can tell “that fox” for me that he has no power to harm me. I fear him no more than I fear a yelping little fox that is scared of his own shadow.”

“Today, and tomorrow, and the third day” are not prophetic terms, but are used simply as a declaration of the fact that our Saviour was assured that the time of his life on earth, the time of his service to the glory of God and men, and the time of his
death were appointed by his Father and ours, and could not be shortened by Herod, or by anyone, or by anything.

Our Master, by using the word “perfected” to describe his death, was saying, “I shall finish what I came here to do. I will not leave this world until my purpose, the purpose appointed for me by my Father, is completed. Then, my life shall be complete.”

It is no accident that this same word (perfected) is applied to our Saviour twice in the Book of Hebrews and to his people, the people he came here to make perfect, three times (Hebrews 2:10; 5:9; 10:10-14; 11:40; 12:23). Our Lord’s perfection as the God-man Mediator, as our Covenant Surety, was and is wrapped up in the salvation (perfection) of those he came here to save. The law could never make anyone perfect (Hebrews 10:1); but Christ did. And he is perfected because he has perfected his people by the work he finished as our Mediator, Surety, Representative, and Substitute (Hebrews 10:10-14; 11:40).

What our Lord here says of himself is true of every believer. The Lord God has put us on this earth for a specific time, to accomplish a specific purpose, and nothing shall prevent it. Nothing can add to or shorten our days. The lesson to be learned from this is clear: Our times are entirely in the hands of our God.

Oh, may God give me grace to live in the frame of mind and heart my Lord exemplified here! We ought to possess a calm, unshaken confidence in our Father’s good purpose. If our hearts are fixed, trusting the Lord, we shall not be afraid of evil tidings. Our times are in our Father’s hands (Psalms 112:4-10; 31:13-20).

Let this be my attitude before every danger, every foe, every trouble, every slanderling tongue, every deceitful spirit: I have and shall continue to have only that which is good for me. I shall live until my work is done, and not a moment longer. All the powers of earth and hell combined cannot harm me. All the
powers of earth and hell combined cannot destroy my life, until the time my Father has ordained. And all the physicians on earth cannot preserve me for one second beyond that time.

Nothing is beyond the reach of a man who has such an attitude regarding his life; and, if we believe God, that ought to be our attitude. The hairs of our heads are all numbered. Our steps are all ordered of the Lord. All things work together for our good. If some Shimei curses me, the Lord will do me good by the wretch’s foul tongue. If afflictions befall me, they shall only assist me. All things are mine. Life! Death! Things Present! Things to Come! All things are mine, for I am Christ’s and Christ is God’s! Let me therefore live and serve my God with utter abandonment to care and fear. “Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” And, then, “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalms 23:6; 56:4; 118:6; 92:1-15; Hebrews 13:5, 6)

“For it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem” (v. 33). The word translated here, “it cannot be”, is found nowhere else in the Word of God. It means “it is impossible”. Yet, many prophets (John the Baptist, to name just one) died somewhere else. So what does our Lord’s statement mean? It means two things:

It would be an unusual thing, the exception, not the rule, for a prophet to die anywhere except at Jerusalem. It would be an unusual thing, the exception, not the rule, for a prophet to die by the hands of any, except at the hands of those who professed to be the servants and representatives of God.

And, second, our Lord here speaks prophetically of his own death. Remember, he is addressing the Pharisees. He is saying, “When I (that great Prophet of whom Moses spoke), when I die it will be at your hands, at Jerusalem; but I am not there yet; and my hour has not yet come.” It is against that backdrop that we must hear his next word.
A Willing Saviour
Third, in verse 34 we see how tender, compassionate, and willing our Lord Jesus Christ is to save sinners who have earned and fully deserve his everlasting fury.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest 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”!

Oh, what a willing Saviour our Saviour is! He is God who “delighteth in mercy”! Aren’t you thankful? Many try to say this cannot be understood of our Lord Jesus in a strict sense, as God, that we must understand this as a display of our Master’s human emotions. The problem with that is this: I have not yet found one of those precise theologians who could tell me how to divide our Redeemer into two persons. This man is God; and this God is man; but he is one Person with two natures.

Let us never try to put God in our little box. He just won’t fit! Let us never try to be more theologically precise than the plain statement of holy scripture. If these blessed, blessed words that fell from the lips of him into whose lips all grace has been poured choke you, you need choking. If you cannot read them without having to explain them away, you need a course in remedial reading.

Salvation is entirely the work of God. All will be saved in the end who were chosen to salvation from the beginning, them and no one else. All will be with Christ in glory for whom Christ made atonement and satisfaction at Calvary, them and no one else. All will be crowned with the heavenly hosts who have been effectually called by the Holy Ghost, them and no one else. But eternal ruin, eternal damnation, everlasting woe is altogether the work of man.

Hear what this Book teaches: If you are saved, go to heaven, enjoy eternal life and glory in the bliss of God’s presence, it will be because of God’s will and God’s work alone. And if you are
lost, perish under the wrath of God, and go to a dark, Christless, eternal hell, it will be your fault, because of your will, and your work alone. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is as willing to save as he is mighty to save (Isaiah 45:22; 55:1-3, 6, 7; Matthew 11:28-30; 23:37; Luke 13:34; John 7:37, 38). Do you not hear his willingness in his words?

If you are lost, perish under the wrath of God, and go to a dark, Christless, eternal hell, it will be your fault, because of your will, and your work alone (Isaiah 59:1, 2; John 5:40). The Lord Jesus Christ came here to save lost sinners. He came “to seek and to save that which was lost.” The Son of God died in the room and stead of the ungodly. The Lamb of God is seated upon the throne of grace in heaven, waiting to be gracious, waiting to save sinners.

Read verse 34 one more time and hear the tender, compassionate and willing heart of Immanuel.

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest 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”!

He knew the wickedness of that city. He knew what crimes had been committed by them. He knew all the prophets they had hated and murdered. He knew what they wanted to do and soon would do to him. Yet, he pities them! Oh, may he give me his Spirit and his grace, that I may be tender, compassionate, and merciful to men!

**Divine Judgment**

Fourth, in verse 35 our Saviour teaches us that in the last day, in that great Day of Judgment, he will be completely vindicated and honoured, even by those who perish under his wrath.

“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.”
“Behold, your house is left unto you desolate”! This is what you have chosen. You shall forever eat the fruit of your own ways (Proverbs 1:31). The God you have despised and forsaken has despised and forsaken you forever!

“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.” You shall see me no more until you see me glorified by all as the Christ of God. In my entry into Jerusalem, when all, even those who later cry, “crucify him”, shall cry, “Here is the Blessed One who comes in the name of the Lord”! (Luke 19:37, 38) And in my glorious second advent when you shall say, as the gaping pit of hell opens wide its mouth to swallow you up, “Here is the Blessed One who comes in the name of the Lord”! (Revelation 1:7; Philippians 2:9-11; Isaiah 45:22-25).

Ye sinners, seek his grace,
Whose wrath ye cannot bear;
Fly to the shelter of his cross,
And find salvation there.

So shall the curse remove,
By which the Saviour bled;
And that last, awful day shall pour
His blessings on your head!
Chapter 7

“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” (Luke 14:1-6).

The Sabbath Day: The Day Of Mercy

The Lord God declares by the prophet Isaiah …

“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

Our all-glorious Saviour made the sabbath a delight for many while he was upon the earth, and continues to make the gospel Sabbath, which the old, legal sabbath portrayed, a delight to sinners to this day.
Christ is our Sabbath; and we find delight in him. When a sinner is turned from his way, from his sin, from the pleasure of his depraved heart, and from this world to the Lord Jesus Christ, finding mercy, grace, salvation, and rest in him, he finds that Christ, in whom he rests, is a delight, a luxury, and that faith in him is an honour. Indeed, all who trust Christ, delight themselves in him, triumph over all their foes in him, and shall at last obtain the full heritage of the heavenly Canaan, called here “the heritage of Jacob”. “For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

A Sabbath Day Miracle
During the time of our Lord’s earthly ministry, the sabbath day was used as a day for healing. By his example, our Saviour displayed that the Old Testament sabbath day was intended and designed by our God to portray this day of grace.

“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” (v. 1). The Jews commonly held great, lavish feasts on their sabbath day. On this occasion our Lord was invited to the house of one of the chief of the Pharisees, one of the Sanhedrim, one of the primary, best known of that band of self-righteous legalists. Our Lord was not invited to the Pharisee’s house out of courtesy, but because these fine, law-keeping, sabbath-keeping religionists had hatched a plan to trap the Master. So “they watched him”.

“And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy” (v. 2). These good, kind religious men baited their trap by setting a certain man before the Saviour who had “the dropsy”. Dropsy is an old term for congestive heart failure. This condition is accompanied by swelling, scanty urine, poor appetite, sluggishness, and debility. The swelling usually begins in the feet and ankles and proceeds up the legs towards the abdomen. It is fairly common among diabetics. In addition to
the swelling, the bladder functions poorly, a person loses his appetite and becomes very sluggish. His swollen limbs become debilitating. After a while, it becomes obvious that he is terribly sick and will soon die, if something is not done to help him.

It is interesting that only Luke, the physician, records this miracle performed by our Lord. Perhaps he did so because in his day any man found in the condition of this man was doomed to a slow, painful death. There was no cure for him, at least no cure that could be wrought by the hands of men.

These men brought this poor, dying wretch to the Pharisee’s house for no other reason than to entrap the Son of God. They cared nothing for him. As religion always does, they were simply using him for their own purposes. But it is written, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psalm 76:10). And their wrath soon showed forth our Saviour’s praise. These devils were but vassals, by whom the Lord of glory was pleased to bring a certain, chosen, dying man to him that he might show in that man the wondrous, saving power of his mercy, love and grace.

“And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?” (v. 3) Though they never spoke a word, the Saviour answered them. He answered their thoughts. They were not merely dealing with a man. They were not attempting to trick a mere prophet. They were dealing with the God of Glory, trying to lay a trap for the omnipotent, omniscient God, and he lets them know it. The Lord Jesus knew exactly what they were up to. He asked them, “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” (v. 4). They held their peace, because they dared not answer. They were trapped by their own trap. They dared not say anything that might show any agreement with the Master. They could not say “yes” without consenting to what he was about to do. And they could not say “no” without denying
that works of mercy were permitted on the sabbath day by Moses. Indeed, the sabbath day was designed to portray this great gospel day in which we live, this day of mercy and grace.

Once the Master had shamed these babblers into silence, he took the man with the dropsy and healed him. He who could dry up the Red Sea, calm the waves of the raging Galilee, and bring water out of a rock had no difficulty drawing a little water from this man’s body. Immediately, the swollen limbs were made whole, perfectly healthy. Then he who was the real Master of Ceremonies in this Pharisee’s house dismissed the man from the table and company and the company of his foes; and he went home perfectly cured.

What a picture this is of our Saviour’s works of grace in chosen, redeemed sinners! He took him. He healed him. He 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?” (v. 5). Again, our Master answered the unspoken quibbles of this cruel, merciless, religious crowd that hated him, hated God, and hated men. They were obviously incensed by what he had done, incensed that a poor, dying man was made whole on the sabbath day. Yet, not one of them would allow his own ox or ass to drown on the sabbath day, if he could help it. Our Lord’s obvious, bold insinuation was this: You gentlemen obviously care much more for your property, for your own beasts than you do for a human being. “And they could not answer him again to these things” (v. 6).

**Other Sabbath Miracles**

Did you ever notice how often our Lord chose to perform his miracles of mercy upon poor, needy souls on the sabbath day? In the gospels we are given six specific cases of cures wrought on the sabbath day. I need not remind you that man was created on the sixth day. Six is the number of man. Our Lord, by
performing these six cures on the sabbath day, seems to be saying, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

The case before us in Luke 14 is one. On the sabbath day our Saviour cast the devil out of a man (Luke 4:31-37). Luke 6 tells us of our Lord healing a man’s withered hand on the sabbath day (Luke 6:6-11). In Luke 13 our Saviour healed a woman who had been plagued with a crippling infirmity for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17). In John 5 we see our Saviour healing a poor, impotent man, a man who had been impotent for a long, long time (John 5:1-9). In John 9 our Lord heals a man born blind, again on the sabbath day (John 9:1-14).

There are three special, very instructive features about all of these six miracles that ought to catch our attention. First, they were all performed on the sabbath day. This day is the day of salvation. Oh, may it be for you the day of salvation. Then, you will call Christ our Sabbath and this his day of grace a delight. Second, each of these wonders was performed by Christ alone. Third, not one of these poor souls sought the Lord’s mercy.

In every example the Saviour was found of them that sought him not (Isaiah 65:1). The possessed man entreated Christ to leave him alone (Luke 4:34). The man with the withered hand did not think of cure (Luke 6:6). The infirm woman had no hope of healing (Luke 13:11). The man with the dropsy did not ask for the blessing (Luke 14:2). The impotent man did not seek Christ (John 5:5). It was unheard of that the eyes of a man born blind should be opened, and, therefore, he did not expect it (John 9:32). But the Lord of the Sabbath is not bound by men. Omnipotent grace is never withered. The arm of the Lord never waits for the will of the sinner (Romans 9:15).

The Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to save chosen sinners; and save them he will. He has redeemed them by his precious blood. He will save them by his omnipotent mercy. And he will do it without their aid, without their work, without
their will, even without their desire. He does it freely!

Physicians never come to the sick until someone sends for them. Christ came to us, who sent not for him, which made him say, “I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not” (Isaiah 65:1). He came to us before we ever thought of coming to him. He sought us long before we sought him. He found us before we ever dreamed of finding him.

When the physician does come, he expects to be paid for his services, whether or not they are effectual. “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10); and he paid all the charge of his long journey.

The great Physician now is here,  
The sympathizing Jesus!  
He speaks the drooping heart to cheer  
O hear the voice of Jesus!

Your many sins are all forgiven.  
O hear the voice of Jesus!  
Go on your way in peace to heaven,  
And wear a crown with Jesus!

All glory to the dying Lamb!  
I now believe in Jesus.  
I love the blessed Saviour’s name,  
I love the name of Jesus.

And when to that bright world above  
We rise to be with Jesus,  
We’ll sing around the throne of love,  
His name, the name of Jesus!  
William Hunter
Delightful Sabbath

In Isaiah 58:13, 14 the prophet of God, with the inspired vision of prophecy, looks beyond the carnal, Jewish sabbath and sees in it a picture of Christ, who is the true Sabbath, and the blessed rest of faith in him. When can we, when do we, “Call the sabbath a delight.” We can and do call the sabbath a delight only when we are made to experience God’s healing of our souls in Christ, only when we are brought to the blessed rest of faith in him who is our Sabbath, when we keep the sabbath of faith, ceasing from our own works and resting in Christ alone for our entire acceptance with God.

We need to understand that the sabbath God required the Jews to keep was only a temporary, typical ordinance, which represented Christ and our redemption by him. When the Lord God instituted sabbath keeping to the Jews in the legal dispensation, he gave two reasons for it.

First, the sabbath was to be kept as a symbol of God’s rest (Exodus 20:8-11). It represented the completion of God’s creation and the satisfaction of God in his work. Though God’s work of creation has been marred by the sin and fall of our race, the sabbath day portrayed a blessed day of glorious rest called “the times of restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21; Colossians 1:20; Ephesians 1:10), when all things shall be restored to God.

Second, the sabbath day was a constant reminder of Israel’s redemption out of Egypt. Hence, it was a picture of our redemption by Christ (Deuteronomy 5:15). In other words, the sabbath day, like all other aspects of the Mosaic law, was a picture prophecy of our perfect redemption by Christ. As the Jews rested on the seventh day of the week from all their works, so believers find perfect rest and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 This becomes obvious when we observe that Isaiah’s exhortation “Call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord”, should read, “Call the sabbath a delight the Holy One of the Lord.”
Christ Our Sabbath

We can and will call the sabbath a delight only when we understand that Christ is our Sabbath. We do not observe a literal, legal sabbath day, because Christ is our Sabbath, and we rest in him. I know many who pretend to keep a literal sabbath day. Many try their best to delight in legal sabbath work. But I do not know a sabbatarian in the world who really delights in his attempts at sabbath keeping, not a single one. Every sabbatarian I know finds the yoke of their legal observance oppressive and galling. It is a spiritual flagellation they feel they must perform in order to be holy.

Sabbath keeping, like animal sacrifices, was a part of the Old Testament law. It has nothing to do with New Testament worship. I know that the sabbath day is frequently mentioned in the four gospels and the Book of Acts, during that transitional period in which the church of God passed from the Old Testament era into the New. However, it is always mentioned in connection with the Jews and Jewish worship in the temple, or in their synagogues. But it is mentioned only two times in all the Epistles (Romans through Revelation).

In Colossians 2:16, 17 we read, “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” Here the Apostle Paul, writing by inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, forbids the observance of legal sabbath days in any form. He does so on the basis of the fact that in Christ God’s elect are entirely free from the law (Romans 7:4; 10:4).

In Hebrews 4:3, 4, 9-11 the sabbath that remains in this gospel age is called “rest”. Here the Apostle shows us that all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ keep the sabbath in a spiritual way. That is to say, they and they only truly keep the sabbath by faith in him, by resting in him.
Finished Work
We can and will call the sabbath a delight when we realize that our all glorious Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Mediator, has entered into his rest; and his rest is glorious, because he has finished his work (Hebrews 4:10; Isaiah 11:10). Our Saviour’s rest in heaven is glorious and it is his glory. “His rest shall be glory”! As God rested on the seventh day, because his work of creation was finished, so the God-man our Mediator has entered into his rest in heaven, because he has made all things new for his people, having finished his work of redemption (Romans 8:34; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Hebrews 10:10-14).

Behold our exalted Saviour! Do you see him seated upon his throne in heaven? There he sits in undisturbed and undisturbable sovereign serenity! His rest is his glory (John 17:2; Philippians 2:9-11). That exalted God-man, as our divinely appointed Representative, has fulfilled all the legal sabbath requirements for us, even as he did all the other requirements of the law. Now, in heaven he is keeping an everlasting sabbath rest (Isaiah 53:10-12). And his rest, which is his glory, tells us that he has finished his work (John 17:4; 19:30), the salvation of his people is certain (Hebrews 9:12), and all his enemies shall soon be made his footstool (Hebrews 10:13). There is no more work to be done. Christ did it all! And when all the work was done for us, our blessed Saviour entered into his rest. Now, all who find rest in him call that sabbath a delight!

Sabbath Rest
All who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ keep the sabbath by faith (Hebrews 4:3), because we have entered into his rest; and we call this blessed sabbath rest of faith in Christ a delight, the delight of our souls. We do not yet keep the sabbath perfectly, because we do not yet trust our Saviour as we should. We do not yet trust him perfectly. But we do keep the sabbath truly and
sincerely by faith. Our sabbath observance is not a carnal, literal thing. We do not keep a sabbath day. God forbids that (Colossians 2:16, 17). We keep the sabbath spiritually by faith.

Remember, the sabbath day was ordained by God in the ceremonial worship of the Jews in the Old Testament as a symbol of God’s rest after creation and as a reminder of the Jews redemption out of Egypt. The essence of sabbath observation was self-denial and consecration to God. Anything personally profitable or pleasurable was expressly forbidden (Isaiah 56:2; 58:13; Ezekiel 20:12, 21). Sabbath observance was, in its essence, an unconditional, all-encompassing, self-denial. It was a renunciation of self and a dedication of one’s self to God. That is exactly the way we observe the sabbath spiritually by faith in Christ, not one day in seven, but all the days of our lives. The believer’s life is a perpetual keeping of the sabbath!

The Lord Jesus Christ gives rest to every sinner who comes to him in faith. He says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Are you labouring and heavy-laden under the load of sin and guilt? Do you long for rest? In your inmost soul do you struggle hard with sin, longing to find peace with God? Will you hear what the Lord Jesus says? “Come.” That is: believe, trust, rely upon me. “Come unto me”! Not to the preacher. Not to my church. Not even to my doctrine. But “Come unto me, and I will give you rest”! When a sinner comes to Christ, he quits working for God’s favour, because he rests his soul upon the finished work of his Substitute (1 Corinthians 1:30, 31).

Yet, this sabbath of faith involves more than a ceasing from our works and the remembrance of our redemption by Christ. It also involves, in its very essence, the consecration of our lives to our dear Saviour (Matthew 11:29, 30). We keep the sabbath of faith and find rest unto our souls as we wilfully, deliberately, wholeheartedly surrender to Christ as our Lord. If we would keep the sabbath, truly keep the sabbath, it will take
considerably more than going to church on Sunday and reserving one day a week for religious exercises! We keep the sabbath by putting ourselves under the yoke of Christ’s dominion, submitting to his will in all things, learning of him what to believe, how to live, and how to honour God. As we do, we find that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. When we submit to Christ’s dominion, when we bow to his will, we find rest for our souls and “call the sabbath a delight”!

While he walked on this earth, our Lord Jesus performed so many miracles of mercy on the legal sabbath day to teach us that “the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27), to teach us that the dawning of the true Sabbath is the day of mercy for chosen, redeemed sinners.
“And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden 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. 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. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:7-11).

“Take The Lowest Room”

Our Lord Jesus is not here giving us a lesson about the excellence of behaving with humility before men and moral virtue. This is obvious for three reasons:

He is addressing a band of lost, self-righteous religious Pharisees.

That which he says here simply is not true with regard to earthly things. In this world, if you want to get ahead, you must push your way ahead. If you want the highest seat, you must take it. If you are willing to settle for the lowest place, you are sure to get it. Everyone around you will gladly accommodate your wish.
In his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:1-8), our Saviour taught us plainly that we must never attempt, in any way, to show our religion, to show godliness, or to show spirituality and devotion to God by any outward action. Let us adorn the gospel (Titus 2:10) by our behaviour, always. But we must never make a show of godliness.

Believers, men and women who live for and seek the glory of God must never behave as proud worldlings do. Let it ever be ours to seek the glory of our God, the good of men, and the welfare of our brethren, each preferring the other better than himself, each submitting to the other, each promoting the other, and each serving the other. But we do not attempt to act religious or make a show of godliness before men.

Christ’s Example
Clearly, our Lord teaches us by the parable in these verses, throughout the scriptures, and by his own example that we ought to be and always behave as truly humble people. One passage will be sufficient to show this: Philippians 2:1-11.

“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 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. Wherefore God also hath 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” (Philippians 2:1-11).

Here in Luke 14:7-11 our Master teaches humility in two ways. First, he tells those who are bidden to a wedding to “sit down in the lowest room”. Second, he declares a great principle, which frequently fell from his lips: “Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

The Key
The key to this parable is found in Proverbs 25:6, 7. “Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen.” The Lord must have had this passage in mind when he spoke this parable. He is the King to whose wedding feast sinners are bidden, before whom we must come in humility.

The shame and confusion of face which in this parable is represented as the lot of mortified pride does not always follow it in this world. Self-assertion, self-assumption, forwardness, and boasting, do not always entail a disgraceful fall upon the person who behaves arrogantly. The meek do not as yet “inherit the earth”, though they assuredly will. David said of the ungodly, “with their mouth they speak proudly” (Psalm 17:10), and “speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous” (Psalm 31:18).

Men who are ambitious and self-seeking at times attain to the height of their ambition, provided, of course, that they have other qualities, such as prudence, cleverness, and perseverance. But a day is coming when the words of Christ with which the parable concludes (v. 11), will be verified in the case of every man. He is the King before whom all pride displays itself, and
before whom it will be abased.

And there is the greater reason that he should do so, for when he had the highest place in the universe next to the eternal Father, he abased himself, and took the lowest place, even the place of the cross of death (2 Corinthians 8:9), in order to save and exalt forever all who humble themselves before him. The Judge at that day will remember and humble every act of pride, just as he will remember and reward those who humble themselves before him. He will bring every idle word into judgment, and make manifest the secrets of all hearts.

**God’s Work**

Yet, this humility is so contrary to our nature that we can never attain it. We can never perform it. We must be humbled by our God, or we will never humble ourselves before God. A humble man is a humbled man. We will never bow before the throne of grace until God himself bows us by his grace. Oh, may God graciously humble us here rather than hereafter! It may be very bitter to have our pride mortified now, but it will be indescribably more bitter to have it mortified before men and angels, and before the presence of the great King and Judge of all the earth.

To know our own sinfulness and weakness and to know our need of Christ is the very beginning of salvation. This thing called “salvation” begins with the conviction of sin. Abraham, and Moses, and Job, and David, and Daniel, and Paul were all truly humbled men. They were men who knew themselves sinners before the thrice holy Lord God; sinners chosen, redeemed, called, forgiven, justified, and accepted in Christ.

**Humility**

What is humility? One word describes it. The root of humility is right “knowledge”. It is wrought in us by the revelation of Christ to us in that day when the Fountain of redemption is opened to
us (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1). The man who really knows himself and his own heart, who knows God and his infinite majesty and holiness, who knows Christ and the price with which he has been redeemed, that man is a humbled man. He counts himself, like Jacob, unworthy of the least of all God’s mercies. He says of himself, like Job, “I am vile.” He cries, like Paul, “I am chief of sinners” (Genesis 32:10; Job 40:4; 1 Timothy 1:15). He considers anything good enough for him, and indescribably better than he deserves. In lowliness of mind he esteems his brethren better than himself (Philippians 2:3).

Ignorance, nothing but sheer ignorance, ignorance of self, of God, and of Christ is the cause of all pride. From that miserable self-ignorance we should daily pray to be delivered. He is the wise man who knows himself; and he who knows himself will find nothing within to make him proud and everything to humble him.

But our Lord does not here set humility before these Pharisees as a virtue to be cultivated. Rather, he is here exposing and rebuking the pride of that self-righteousness and unbelief that keeps sinners from trusting him.

Context
Look at the context in which this parable is given. Our Lord has just healed a poor, despised, needy man of the dropsy on the sabbath day, thereby condemning the Pharisees who used him to bait a trap, by which they hoped to destroy our Lord’s credibility as God’s prophet (vv. 1-6). Then, notice that the opening word of verse 7 is a conjunction “And.” When the Pharisees could not answer him, we read, “And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms” (v. 7).

Then, after giving this parable, the Lord declares to the proud Pharisee who had invited him to dinner that true humility, true goodness serves those who can give nothing in return, from
whom no benefit can be derived (vv. 12-14). Obviously, he was not teaching this work monger how to earn God’s blessing in the resurrection. Rather, he is teaching this man and us how God dispenses his favour freely! The gospel of Christ is likened to an invitation to a great feast. And the Lord God, our great Saviour graciously calls the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, those who cannot recompense him, to his banqueting table.

One man in the crowd understood exactly what the Master was saying. Look at verse 15. “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, our Lord continues his instruction. Remember, he is still in the Pharisee’s house. He is still talking about how men are to behave when they are invited to a wedding feast. Specifically, the Lord Jesus is here telling us how poor sinners must come to God’s great wedding feast.

“Then said he 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. 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. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then 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. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. 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. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper” (Luke 14:16-24).
The Message
The purpose of our Lord Jesus in this parable is to teach us how sinners seeking mercy must come to God. Here is the message of the parable. We must come to God, we must come to Christ as humble, worthless, doomed, damned, helpless, bankrupt sinners, taking our place in the dust before him. We must bow before him in shame, taking the lowest seat in the dust before the throne of grace. “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

This is a mystery that natural men do not understand. This is something no man will ever understand until he is born of God and taught by his Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:7-14). In the natural world the way up is up, but in the spiritual world the way up is down. “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” In the natural world, to live is to live, but in the spiritual world the way to live is to die. “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39). In the natural world men find satisfaction in their own strength, but Paul declared, “when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). The greatest thing God can do for a person (whatever the cost) is to show him in heart and soul the vanity of all things in this world (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14), and to turn his interest, affection, love, and concern from the world to Christ (Matthew 5:3-12).

To be full is to be emptied of self. To be wise is to become a fool for Christ’s sake. To be clothed we must be stripped. To be rich we must be made poor (Proverbs 16:18, 19; Matthew 5:3; 11:29; James 4:6). Would you come to God and obtain the mercy and grace that he alone can give? Come to Christ. Come, taking the only ground he gives, as a poor sinner with nothing to give, trusting Christ alone for everything (1 John 1:7-10). Let us ever come to God just as we came to him in the beginning. “As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him”
(Colossians 2:6).

Naught have I gotten, but what I received.  
Grace hath bestowed it, since I have believed.  
Boasting excluded, pride I abase  
I’m only a sinner, saved by grace!  

James M. Gray
Chapter 9

“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 neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. 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. 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” (Luke 14:12-15).

Living For Eternity

It is Saturday evening, the Jewish Sabbath, and the Lord Jesus has been invited to dinner by one of the leaders among the Pharisees (14:1), the most zealous of the zealous law-keepers among the Jews. There is no indication that I know of that our Saviour was ever invited back a second time to a Pharisee’s house; and it is not hard to see why. It appears that every time he opened his mouth, he undressed someone’s hypocrisy. There never was another man whose words were so penetrating and so exposing. When our Lord spoke, he opened and exposed the hearts of men (Hebrews 4:12, 13).

When our Lord spoke, he spoke as one having authority, divine, penetrating, omniscient authority. The Pharisees once reported of him, “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46).
It seems that every time our Lord spoke in a crowd, large or small, there was a division because of his words. Those who are “of the truth” listen and obey. He tells us, “My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me” (John 10:27). Those who are not of the truth do not have ears to hear or eyes to see. The Lord says to them, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word … he that is of God heareth God’s words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God” (John 8:43, 47).

The Healing
The first thing our Lord did at this Saturday dinner was heal a man of dropsy. He asked the law-experts and Pharisees if they thought healing on the Sabbath was lawful. They did not answer, but their silence clearly meant, “No it is not lawful.” Back in Luke 13:14 the synagogue ruler spoke “with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.” Our Lord responds to their silence here the same way he responded to that. “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?” (Luke 14:5) Again, they gave no answer.

Hypocrisy Undressed
The Master leaves it for them and us to draw the inference. It is unmistakable. Religionists, legalists, and self-righteous Pharisees have a keen interest in their own welfare. When the things of God seem to stand between them and their personal interests, they have no difficulty bending the Word of God and compromising the things of God to accommodate their interests. The preservation of their own interests is clearly more important than the will of God, the Word of God, and the worship of God.
But when it comes to another person’s need, whose illness, pain, or loss is no skin off their noses, they become conveniently rigid in their hardness, that is to say, in their spirituality! The meanest, most wicked, hard-hearted people in this world are religious people who have no idea who God is, “whose god is their belly”! Our Lord held such men in utter contempt; and I do, too. The first lesson for us to learn from this event in the earthly life of our Lord is this: Religion without Christ makes men and women twofold more the children of hell than they were before.

The first thing our Lord did at this dinner party was heal that poor man with the dropsy, exposing the hard-heartedness of his religious host. He publicly undressed the man’s hypocrisy. Not the most ingratiating thing to do to your host, but certainly the most gracious.

**Pride Undressed**

Then, the second thing he did must have been even more shocking. Our Master publicly undressed the pride of the dinner guests, right there in front of everybody. He has been sitting there watching them come in. And what does he look for? How they are dressed? Where they are from? What are their jobs? No. He looks for what they love. The keen eye of omniscience knows where our treasure is. Sooner or later, he will expose it. Where our treasure is there our hearts are. So the Lord watches and sees what the treasure of these religious men is. Here it is: They love the praise of men. They love to be esteemed for occupying the seats of honour. He watches as they move in and out of conversations, weaving their way, unnoticed by others.

What does the Son of God think of this love of honour and esteem, this love of distinction? He says, “Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets” (Luke 11:43; See Luke 20:46, 47). Two things always go hand in hand with loving the place of
honour: the exploitation of the weak and the condemnation of those deemed less honourable. If you crave the praise of men and a widow’s house stands in your way, you will devour it without a thought. But in the end your own house will collapse in the flood of God’s judgment. If we pursue the seat of honour on earth, there will be no seat for us in among the redeemed in glory (Luke 14:11; Matthew 5:3, 5, 7; 18:3). “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 14:11).

**Motive Undressed**

You might think the Lord has ruffled enough feathers for one evening. He had publicly undressed the hypocrisy of the legalists and their pride. Our Lord knew how to spoil a dinner party. But he is not done. Up to this point, he has been talking in general to the guests at the party. Now, he turns (vv. 12-14) to address the host. Here, he undresses the man’s motive, the motive of his heart, before all his guests.

“Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, nor thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. 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.”

What an unusual way of thinking! What strange reasoning! The Lord says, “When you have a lavish dinner party, don’t invite your relatives, friends, and rich neighbours, who can repay you, but those from whom you can expect no gain or advantage of any kind.”

Our Lord could not have been more coarsely blunt if he had put his finger right in this proud Pharisee’s face. He said, “You, sir, hope to go to heaven because of your goodness, and there’s no goodness in you. You are motivated, in all your displays of
goodness, by your own, personal interest. Everything you pretend to do for others, you really do for yourself. And that shall be your eternal ruin.”

Who on earth would talk like that? Probably someone whose Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36); someone who knows that 1000 years on this earth are like yesterday when it is gone (Psalm 90:4); someone who knows that our life is but a vapour that appears and in a moment vanishes away (James 4:14); who knows that he who saves his life now will lose it, and he who loses it now in love will save it (Mark 8:35); and who knows that the resurrection, the Day of Judgment, and eternity are real. That someone is the Son of God, our Saviour. No man ever spoke like this Man.

Lessons Intended
But why did our Lord speak as he did at this dinner party? Why did he do the things he did? Was it merely to show up these men? Was it simply to expose their condemnation? Was it just to publicly humiliate them? Of course not! Our Master’s purpose in his behaviour and in his speech, here and always, was to teach and instruct us in very important spiritual things, to set forth the gospel of God’s free grace in him. Let me show you some of the obvious lessons our Lord would have us learn from this passage.

The first thing to be learned from our Master here is the fact that the Son of God came into this world to seek, serve, and save poor, needy sinners, from whom he could never receive any recompense.

Be sure you do not misunderstand me. There is no doubt that our Lord teaches us, indeed the grace of God experienced in the heart teaches us as well as the whole of holy scripture, that we ought always to care for the poor and needy among us, particularly for those who are numbered among the saints. “The poor shall never cease out of the land” (Deuteronomy 15:11); and those who are able ought to be forward in assisting them.
Not to do so is to hate and despise them; and those who do not love their brethren do not know God (1 John 3:14-17). As we ought to care for the poor, so, too, we ought to give particular care and attention to our weaker brethren. Bearing one another’s burdens, we fulfil the law of Christ (Galatians 6:20).

But out Lord is not teaching this Pharisee a lesson in moral uprightness. His aim is much higher. Like the man described in verse 2, who had the dropsy, you and I are poor, helpless, perishing sinners. We could do nothing for ourselves. We could not help ourselves. And no one else could help us, if they were so inclined. When the Lord first begins his work of grace in us, it is not because we want him, or have come to him, or have prayed for help. Not at all! This man apparently expected nothing from the Lord Jesus. There is no indication that he even looked at him. But the Master took up the rich Pharisee’s invitation to dinner, because that poor man with the dropsy was there, for whom the time of mercy had come.

The second thing that is obvious here is the fact that in order to save such poor, needy sinners as we are, the Son of God took the lowest place among men.

Humility is a gift of grace. The grace of God humbles men. But our Lord is not teaching this crowd to make themselves humble, that they might be exalted and recompensed in the Day of Judgment. Indeed, such self-serving humility is not humility at all, but a mere show of humility. Our Lord is describing true humility, his own (Philippians 2:1-11). His humility is exemplary. We ought to be of the same mind. But he is the pattern. His humility was voluntary. He humbled himself unto the very lowest, not that he might be exalted, but for the love he has to us and to the glory of God. For that, he has been exalted and shall be recompensed in the Day of Judgment (2 Corinthians 8:9; Isaiah 45:20-25; 53:10-12).

The third thing our Redeemer teaches us here is that there shall be a Resurrection Day and a Judgment Day.
Everything our Saviour did in this world he did with eternity before his eyes. He lived in the constant awareness of eternity. Oh, may God give us grace to do the same!

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 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; but the things which are not seen are eternal. “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” (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:1).

We are immortal souls. We are all dying creatures, moving rapidly to the grave. There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust, a resurrection of life and a resurrection of damnation (John 5:28, 29). There shall be a Day of Judgment, at which we shall all be recompensed for all that we have done forever (Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:11-15).

The Judge of all in that great day shall be that Man who was crucified at Calvary, that Man who is seated on the throne in heaven, that Man who is God, the God-man, our Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. The basis of judgment shall be the record in heaven, the books of God’s remembrance, and another book called, “the Book of Life”. All shall perish, all shall be forever damned whose names are not found written in the Book of Life. The torments heaped upon the damned in hell shall be a just recompense, an exact recompense, and an everlasting recompense of Divine justice; and the damned themselves shall be forced to acknowledge this.

Let us learn to live every day in the immediate prospect of the last great day, when the dead shall be raised to meet God in judgment. There shall be a resurrection after death. Let this never be forgotten. The life that we live here in the flesh is not all. The death of these bodies is not the end of our existence. The visible world around us is not the only world with which we
have to do. All is not over when the last breath is drawn, and men and women are carried to their long home in the grave. The trumpet shall one day sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. All who are in the grave shall hear Christ’s voice and come forth: they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.

Let us live like men and women who believe in a resurrection and a life to come, and desire to be always ready for another world. So living, we shall look forward to death with calmness. So living, we shall take patiently all that we have to bear in this world. Trials, losses, disappointments, ingratitude will affect us little. We shall not look for our reward here. Knowing that all will be rectified in that great day, and that the Judge of all the earth will do right, we shall patiently await that day (Genesis 18:25).

But how can we bear the thought of a resurrection? What shall enable us to look forward to death, the resurrection, the judgment, and eternity without alarm? Faith in Christ! Believing him, we have nothing to fear. Our sins will not appear against us. The demands of God’s law will be found completely satisfied. We shall stand firm in the great day, and none shall lay anything to our charge (Romans 8:33). All whose names are written in the Book of Life, all who stand before God in Christ, washed in his blood, robed in his righteousness, shall be forever blessed. And the bliss and glory and blessedness heaped upon the saved in heaven shall be a just recompense, an exact recompense, and an everlasting recompense of Divine justice (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16; 50:20).

There seems to have been one man in that crowd who heard and understood our Lord’s words. Perhaps everything recorded in this passage came to pass specifically because the Lord Jesus had come to this place, to this Pharisee’s house to seek and find this one sinner, whose time of love had come. Look at verse 15.
“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.” I have found it so. Have you? “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.”
Chapter 10

“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, 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. 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. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then 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. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. 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. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper” (Luke 14:15-24).

The Great Supper

Our Lord Jesus is in the house of one of the chief Pharisees. He had performed a great miracle on the sabbath day, healing a man of the dropsy. The Pharisees and religious legalists, of course,
were terribly offended by that act of mercy (vv. 1-6). Then, the Master gave out a parable declaring his method of grace and salvation (vv. 7-11). In verses 12-14, he very pointedly applied the parable, speaking directly to the Pharisee who had invited him to dinner, exposing that man’s hypocrisy. There was at least one man in the crowd who heard and understood what the Saviour was saying. When he heard the Saviour’s words, that man said to the Master, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God” (v. 15). It is in response to that man’s assertion that our Lord spoke the parable recorded in verses 16-24.² This is a parable full of instruction. May God the Holy Spirit now teach us its meaning and apply it to our hearts.

A Great Supper

“Then said he unto him” to the man who had declared, “Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” “A certain man made a great supper.” This is not the Lord’s Supper, which had not yet been established. And this is not the marriage supper of the Lamb, which will take place at the end of time. This great supper is the gospel feast of the boundless grace of God set before poor, needy, hungry sinners in the preaching of the gospel.

It is called a “supper”, because it is made in the end of the world, in the last days. It is called a “great supper”, because he who made the supper is the King of kings, and Lord of lords. It is a great supper, a feast of fat things, of wine upon lees well refined. This great, gospel feast is a supper provided by the great God, spread at great cost (the precious blood of Christ), a supper with great provisions of mercy, love, and grace, a supper for great sinners with great needs, a supper for a great multitude,

² Though there are clearly points of similarity between this and the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22, these are two distinct parables, spoken on two separate occasions.
and a supper that is to last a great time, until the end of time.

“And bade many.” Certainly, the reference here is to the Jews, the many physical descendants of Abraham, to whom alone God sent the gospel throughout the Old Testament. By the law and the Prophets, by John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus himself, and by the Apostles, the people of Israel were bidden to the supper and refused to come, refused to believe God. But we dare not limit the parable’s message to the Jews. This word from God our Saviour is to be applied to all who are privileged to hear the gospel of the grace of God. The King of Heaven has made a great supper and bids you and me come to the supper.

The Servant

“And sent his servant at supper time.” The servant here may refer to John the Baptist, or to the Lord Jesus, to the Apostles of Christ, or to the Spirit of God. Certainly, the servant is

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3 A. W. Pink wrote, “In Luke 14:16 we read, “A certain man made a great supper, and bade many.” By comparing carefully what follows here with Matthew 22:2-10 several important distinctions will be observed. We take it that these passages are two independent accounts of the same parable, differing in detail according to the distinctive purpose and design of the Holy Spirit in each Gospel. Matthew’s account in harmony with the Spirit’s presentation there of Christ as the Son of David, the King of the Jews says, “A certain king made a marriage for his son.” Luke’s account where the Spirit presents Christ as the Son of man says, “A certain man made a great supper and bade many.” Matthew 22:3 says, “And sent forth his servants;” Luke 14:17 says, “And sent his servant.” Now what we wish particularly to call attention to is, that all through Matthew’s account it is “servants”, whereas in Luke it is always “servant”. The class of readers for whom we are writing are those that believe unreservedly, in the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures, and such will readily acknowledge that there must be some reason for this change from the plural number in Matthew to the singular one in Luke. We believe the reason is a weighty one and that attention to this variation reveals an important truth. We believe that the servants in Matthew, speaking generally, are all who go forth preaching the Gospel, but that the “Servant” in Luke 14 is the Holy Spirit himself. This is not incongruous, or derogatory to the Holy Spirit, for God the Son, in the days of his earthly ministry, was the Servant of Jehovah (Isaiah 42:1). It will be observed that in Matthew 22 the “servants” are sent forth to do three things: first, to “call” to the wedding (v. 3); second, to “tell” those which are bidden ... all things are ready; come unto the marriage (v. 4); third, to “bid” to the marriage” (v. 9); and these three are the things which those who minister the Gospel today are now doing. In Luke 14 the Servant is also sent forth to do three things: first, he is “to say” to them that were bidden, Come: for all things are now ready” (v. 17); second, he is to “bring in” the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind” (v. 21); third, he is to “compel” them to come in” (v. 25), and the last two of these the Holy Spirit alone can do!
representative of every servant of God who is sent forth to preach the gospel of the grace of God to perishing sinners. “To say to them that were bidden, come.” Gospel preachers are God’s servants, sent forth into the world to call sinners to the table of grace, to call sinners to Christ.

All God’s servants proclaim a feast of God’s providing “for all things are now ready”. For all who come to the feast, for all who trust him, there is in the Lord Jesus Christ a righteousness ready to wear, pardon freely bestowed, a redemption fully accomplished, and a full and perfect everlasting salvation. There is in Christ a sonship for sinners in union with him. But this is one wedding feast at which no gifts are accepted. Everything is freely provided!

Excuses for Unbelief

“And they all with one consent began to make excuse.” Unbelievable as it may appear, all who are called to Christ make excuses not to come. And all who are called make the same excuses. All who are called of God by the gospel to life and salvation in Christ, all who are called to believe on the Son of God, all who are bidden to follow Christ, have (in their own minds) completely reasonable excuses for disobedience. Rather than praying to God for mercy, they say, “I pray thee have me excused”!

“The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it.” What fool would buy a piece of ground, and then go see it? He bought a piece of ground from a man without seeing it. What confidence he must have had in that man. But he has no confidence in God! The second was worse. “And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to

In the above scripture we see that “the Servant”, the Holy Spirit, compels certain ones to come into the “supper” and herein is seen his sovereignty, his omnipotency, his divine sufficiency. The clear implication from this word “compel” is, that those whom the Holy Spirit does “bring in” are not willing of themselves to come.”
prove them.” He bought five yoke of oxen without knowing whether they could bear a yoke or pull a cart, taking a man’s word for it. Men will do that; but none will believe God! The excuse made by the third man is the worst of the three. “I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.” Had he said, I will not come, he would at least have told the truth.

It is not only man’s impotence that keeps him from Christ, but also his will. He has no will to trust the Son of God. It is true that no man can come to Christ, except as God gives him grace to come (John 6:44). Yet, none will come (John 5:40). That is a matter of personal, deliberate choice and responsibility for which all will be held accountable in the Day of Judgment (Proverbs 1:23-33).

He who has married a wife is doubly responsible to come to the feast. He is responsible for himself and his wife. If his wife will not come, he is a fool to let her keep him away. They that have wives must be as though they had none. We must not allow carnal unions, sentiments, and affections to keep us from following Christ. Adam paid a very high price for hearkening to the voice of his wife. Our Lord requires that we forsake husbands and wives, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, as well as houses and lands, if we would be his disciples.

The Servant’s Report
“So that servant came and showed his Lord these things.” Gospel preachers watch over the souls of men as those who give account (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

“Then the master of the house being angry.” Multitudes think it is a light thing to trample the blood of Christ under their feet, but that will not always be the case. God Almighty will soon make all men see how offensive unbelief is to him (Proverbs 1:23-33; 29:1).

“And said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city; and bring in hither the poor.” We preach the
gospel to the poor, those who have no bread for their souls, those who have no righteous garments, but only filthy rags, those who have no money to buy, no means to pay their debt. That is to say, the gospel of God’s free grace in Christ is good news to those who are poor in spirit.

“And the maimed.” Grace is for the needy, poor, impotent, helpless sinners, without strength, without hope, without life, without help. “And the halt.” Christ saves the lost, those who are halting because they do not know where to go for grace and mercy and help, and do not know the way. Sinners are not only poor, lost, and ignorant, but cripple too, being maimed by a terrible fall. “And the blind.” Yes, the Lord God bids us go out and call poor, maimed, halt, blind sinners to the feast of grace, the blind who cannot see, the halt who cannot come, and the poor who have nothing to bring!

Plenty Of Room
“And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded; and yet there is room.” There is plenty of room in the house of grace and plenty of bread for hungry sinners. In Revelation 4 John saw twenty-four seats around the throne of God. Each of these seats were filled with the twenty-four elders sitting before the throne. They were all clothed with white garments, and they all wore crowns of pure gold on their heads. The twenty-four elders represent the whole church of God. As the twelve patriarchs represent the whole church of the Old Testament and the twelve apostles represent the whole church of the New testament, these twenty-four elders represent all of God’s elect, the whole church of God, the Israel of God (Revelation 21:12-14). I call your attention to this because it must be clearly understood that every seat around the throne is filled. Not one of God’s elect will be missing in that great day when Christ presents his redeemed ones in glory. Every chosen sinner, every soul for whom Christ shed his blood at Calvary, every sinner
called by the efficacious, irresistible grace and power of God the Holy Spirit will be seated before the Triune Jehovah in eternal glory.

Having said that as plainly as I know how, it must be understood and declared by all who preach the gospel that there is plenty of room at the table of grace for any and all who come to Christ. “Whosoever will, let him come”!

Compel Them
Still, we are aware that none to whom we preach the gospel will come to Christ until compelled by the irresistible grace of God the Holy Spirit in effectual calling. We read in verse 23 “And the Lord said unto the servant go out into the highways and hedges: and compel them to come in.” None but God the Spirit can effectually compel lost sinners to come to the Saviour. Yet, this command in this parable must be applied to gospel preachers, too. Yes, we are to compel, persuade, and force sinners by the persuasive preaching of the gospel to come to Christ (2 Corinthians 4:18-6:2).

This shows us, as John Gill rightly observed, “the nature of the gospel ministry, which is to persuade Japheth to dwell in the tents of Shem; and the power that attends it by the Divine Spirit; the case and condition of souls, who are generally bashful and backward, judging themselves unworthy; as also the earnest desire, and great liberality of Christ, the Master of the feast.”

“That my house may be filled.” And filled it shall be! God’s house shall be filled with chosen, redeemed sinners, as a sheepfold filled with a flock of sheep. And each one shall be filled with grace and glory. “And so all Israel shall be saved.”

“For I say unto you, that none of those men that were bidden shall taste of my supper.” There is an infinite, boundless provision of grace in Christ for all who want it (Isaiah 55:1; Matthew 11:28-30; John 6:37; 7:37). Christ is the Bread on the table. All who are hungry are welcome to eat. Christ is the Water
of Life. All who are thirsty are welcome to drink. If you perish in your sins, if you go to hell, if you will not come to the bounteous feast of grace, you will have no one to blame but yourself. Then your lands and oxen and relations will be fuel for the fires of your everlasting torment. May God the Holy Spirit sweetly force you to come to the Lord Jesus!
Chapter 11

“And there went great multitudes with him: 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. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. 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. 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. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 14:25-35).

The One Issue Between God And Man

Everywhere I go in the United States and abroad I meet with men and women who see the withered, lifeless condition of the church. They know that something is wrong, both with
themselves and with the church. And they are looking for something. They know that something is missing in their own religious experience and in the church, but do not know what it is. The fact is they have never been confronted with the one issue between God and man. The preachers they hear and the churches they attend do not even know what that one issue is. Do you?

The issue between you and God is not what you do or do not do. Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that it does not matter how you live. It matters a great deal. God has told us how to live in this world. And we are responsible to obey him. But I am saying the issue between you and God is not what you do. There are a great many people in hell today who lived much better lives than either you or me. The rich young ruler and the Pharisees stand as indisputable examples of that fact (Matthew 5:20).

The issue between you and God is not what you have felt, experienced, and done in the spiritual realm. We hear much talk these days about the baptism of the Holy Ghost, speaking in tongues, miracles, and emotionalism as evidences of God’s blessings and the absence of these things as an evidence of his disapproval and wrath. But that is not the case at all. In the Day of Judgment many will be damned who felt more, experienced more, and did more in what we call the spiritual realm than you or me (Matthew 7:22, 23).

And the issue between you and God is not what, or how much you know and believe about the Person and work of Christ. Again, let me be understood. Doctrinal truth, gospel knowledge is vital. You must know and believe the doctrine of the gospel. But accurate, factual, orthodox knowledge is not salvation. A person can believe the truth about Christ and not be saved. A man can believe the doctrine of the gospel and yet be lost. Judas Iscariot, Demas, and Diotrephes stand as glaring beacons to warn us of the fact that the issue between God and
man is not what you believe.

**The Lordship Of Christ**

The issue between God and man is the Lordship of Christ. The issue between God and man is, who is going to be boss? Who is going to rule? Christ or you? Rolfe Barnard told a story about a young preacher he met who started a church with nine families. In a short while the congregation grew in number and caused the city where they lived to sit up and take notice. That church, Barnard said, was “A fellowship of men and women who lived in the power of the resurrection life of the risen Lord.” When Barnard asked him the secret to his ministry, the young preacher said, “Bro. Barnard, there isn’t but one message to be preached, and that is God’s eternal purpose in Jesus Christ, that on the basis of his life laid down God has purposed to set up his totalitarian rule in the hearts of men.”

What a message! If it ever penetrates our hearts, the people around us will sit up and take notice. God Almighty has made Christ Lord of all things (John 17:2; Romans 14:9; Hebrews 10:10-14; Philippians 2:5-11); and he is determined to put all things under his feet, in particular to bring you and me to bow to the rule of his Son.

The one issue between God and man is the absolute Lordship of Christ. It always has been and always will be. The issue is not whether you want to go to heaven or to hell when you die. Everybody wants to go to heaven. The issue is not do you want to have peace, or do you want to live in turmoil. Everybody wants to live in peace. The issue between you and God is his Son. Will you, or will you not bow to the claims of Christ, your sovereign Lord? Everyone is going to bow, either willingly or unwillingly, either now or at the judgment seat. If you willingly bow to Christ now, that is salvation. But bow you will to Jesus Christ the Lord. God has purposed it. And God will do it. Even if he sends you to hell, God is going to put you in
subjection to his Son (Isaiah 9:6, 7; Psalm 110:1). This has always been the issue.

**In The Garden**
This was the issue in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15-17). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, whatever it was, was the symbol of God’s dominion, his rule, his authority. When Adam ate of the fruit of that tree, he was saying, “God has no right to be God. I will not have him to rule over me, even if I suffer his wrath forever.” Remember, “Adam was not deceived” (1 Timothy 2:14). He knew exactly what he was doing in his rebellion; and you do too.

Your problem is not that you are ignorant, or deceived. You know your depravity, your guilt, your sinfulness. You know who God is and what God requires (righteousness and satisfaction). And you know what Christ has done for sinners. Your problem is that you will not have Christ to reign over you.

**At Calvary**
This was the issue at Calvary. That mob of rebels did not crucify the Lord of Glory because they did not believe his words, but because they would not submit to his rule on his terms. They wanted to take Jesus and make him king on their terms, a king whom they controlled (John 6:14, 15). But they would not bow to his dominion and be ruled by him. They said, “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14).

**Today**
This is still the issue today. This is the issue with men, with preachers, and in churches. Does God have the right to be God and does he exercise that right? Does God have the right to sit on his throne and do whatsoever he will? The Bible says he does. Does God exercise that right? The Bible says he does (Psalms 115:3; 135:6).
God Almighty will not abdicate his throne. He will not step down. He will not quit announcing his commands, pressing his claims and meddling with our lives. God demands that we surrender, that we give ourselves up to the rule of Christ his Son. Saving faith is nothing less than surrender to Christ the Lord. If I would be saved, I must lose my life to Christ (Mark 8:34, 35): not my heart, not my soul, not my mind, not one day in seven, not a tithe, not a little time each morning and evening, but my life! Christ will not have me unless he has all of me. And he will not have you unless he has all of you (Luke 14:33).

C. H. Spurgeon said, “No man has truly given himself to Christ unless he has said, ‘My Lord, I give Thee this day my body, my soul, my powers, my talents, my goods, my house, my children, and all that I have. Henceforth, I hold them at Thy will, as a steward under Thee. Thine they are. As for me, I have nothing. I have surrendered all to Thee!’”

If we want to understand the mess we are in now, we have to understand how we got in this mess. It all began in the Garden of Eden. When Adam, with his eyes fully open, ate the forbidden fruit, two things happened. First, God’s throne was threatened by his creature. If Adam had won, had he gotten his way, God would have been out of business. God would have ceased to rule the world. And if the sons of Adam had their way today, God would cease to rule. But that cannot be. God will never give up his dominion.

Second, man lost his wholeness. The scriptures speak of the “natural man”. That is man in his fallen condition. The natural man is out of kilter. He is depraved, beside himself. He must be brought to himself, or he will never be reconciled to God. As the insane prodigal had to return to the rule of his father’s house before he could enjoy the peace of his father’s house, so we must return to the rule of God, we must bow to the dominion of Christ, before we can be made whole. The throne rights of King Jesus have to be settled and acknowledged in our hearts.
Barnard said, “Man’s wholeness was lost in Eden. Man was made to be governed. And there’s never been any government placed on anybody’s shoulders, except Jesus Christ’s! “The government shall be upon his shoulder.” (Isaiah 9:6). This whole outfit has been turned over to him. Nobody now has the right to make the decisions except Christ.” If ever we come to know Christ the Lord, we will surrender everything to his dominion.

Christ Must Reign
One of these days God is going to accomplish his purpose. It is written of the Lord Jesus, “He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet” (1 Corinthians 15:25). Sooner or later, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:8-11). That is the Father’s decree (Psalm 110). That is what the Father promised the Son in the covenant (Psalm 2:8). That is the reward of our Saviour’s obedience (John 17:1, 2; Romans 14:9). That is the end for which all things were made (Revelation 4) and shall be the everlasting delight of his saints (Revelation 5). Therefore, “He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet”!

The one issue between God and man is the dominion of Christ. Who is going to be boss? Man was made to be governed. An ungoverned man is an incomplete man. The only way man can be made complete is by being ruled. The personality of manhood was designed for something greater than a self-centred animal existence. Man was not made to be alone, to live unto himself, but to be lost in the purpose of God. We were made to serve God! Only in his service can we find perfect freedom. Sin is slavery. Rebellion is bondage. To be free, we must be brought under the yoke and dominion of the Son of God. Salvation is nothing less than the restoration of God’s throne in the heart of man.
Our Threefold Message

If the one issue between God and man is the rule and dominion of Christ as Lord, what must our message to man be? Every gospel preacher is an ambassador of the King of heaven and earth. God has sent each with a message to proclaim to rebels throughout his kingdom. And that message is threefold.

First, God sends his servants to declare that Jesus Christ, his Son, is the Lord and King of the universe (2 Corinthians 4:5; Acts 2:36-38). The message of the gospel is not a proposal, a plan, or a proposition, but a Person, Jesus Christ the Lord. God has not sent me to define and defend a doctrine, but to proclaim a Person. To preach the gospel is to preach him for whom, through whom, and in whom God has purposed to fulfil all things.

The message which the Apostles preached, by which they turned the world upside down was the Lordship of Christ (Acts 2:36). They went everywhere preaching Jesus and the resurrection. The whole creation shall soon be brought in subjection to his throne. God is going to redeem this world. He is going to restore everything to the rule of Christ (Ephesians 1:10). The gospel is the story of how God has put all his purposes in Christ. It is as broad as Christ and as narrow as Christ. It shuts the door of hope everywhere else, except in Christ. In Christ alone the door is open. He is the Door.

The issue of the hour is man’s rebellion to God’s throne. And the message of the gospel is Christ Jesus the Lord, the person in whom God has established and will establish his dominion over his creatures. To be saved is to be in agreement with God’s purpose. To be lost is to be in rebellion to God’s purpose. To be reconciled to God is to be reconciled to his revelation, to his righteousness, to his redemption, and to his

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4 In the Book of Acts the words “preach”, “preaching”, and “preached” are used 37 times. In every place where those words are found the subject preached was Christ the Lord.
rule.

Second, the message of the gospel is a word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). To be saved is to be converted to the rule of God in Christ. To be saved is to be reconciled to the rule of God in Christ. Salvation is the free consent of my heart to the sovereign throne of almighty God. Sin is much more than an act. It is a condition, a condition of rebellion against the sovereign rule of Christ. And salvation is much more than an act. It is a condition, a condition of reconciliation to the sovereign dominion of God in Christ. The message of reconciliation is redemption fully accomplished by Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). The condition of reconciliation is surrender, unconditional surrender to the rule of Christ. That is what faith is. Faith believes the record God has given of his Son. And faith acts upon that belief. Faith is belief in action. Salvation is conversion to God. It is the life-long pursuit of God, his will, and his glory.

Third, the message of the gospel is a message of God’s rule restored. I know that God rules everywhere and in all things now. He always has and always will. But one of these days, God is going to put down all rebellion and bring everything in captivity to the rule of Christ (Revelation 19:1-6).

Two Kinds Of Faith
There are two kinds of faith. There is a faith that centres in me, and what I can get from God. And there is a faith that centres in God and his glory. If my faith is primarily concerned with me, and what I want, then the object of my faith is me. I really worship myself. If my faith is primarily concerned with God and his glory, then God is the Object of my faith. I worship him. Martin Luther once defined salvation as “the realization of God’s will and purpose, whatever it might be, rather than the satisfaction of human need.” He saw that true faith is not seeking something from God, but bowing to the rule of God. Calvin said, “True faith is having confidence in God, regardless
of profit or loss.” It is the heart’s willing affirmation of God’s right to be God. This is the one issue between God and man. That is exactly what our Lord Jesus Christ asserts in Luke 14:26-33.

“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. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. 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. 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. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.”

If we would have Christ, we must surrender all to him. Christianity, true Christianity, true saving faith involves a total surrender to Christ the Lord. Either you will be a servant under the dominion of King Jesus, voluntarily giving up all to his claims, or you will go to hell. Our Lord Jesus Christ requires total and unreserved surrender to himself. Christ will be Lord of all, or he will not be Lord at all. Is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, your Lord? Is he truly your Lord?

That is the one issue between God and man.
“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them …” (Luke 15:1-32).

Lost And Found

This chapter and the message it contains needs no introduction. The chapter opens with publicans and sinners gathering around the Son of God to hear his words of mercy and grace, and with Pharisees and Scribes griping about it (vv. 1, 2). These two groups of men always brought out our Saviour’s deepest emotions. Publicans and sinners evoked his tenderness, compassion, mercy, love, and grace. Whenever and wherever we see publicans and sinners coming to him, we see the Friend of sinners joyously engaged in ministering to them. Pharisees and scribes evoked open displays of contempt, anger, and wrath. Our Master simply could not stomach self-righteous, religious legalists. He never stayed in their company very long. They didn’t like Him; and he didn’t like them. He scorned them, rebuked them, derided them, and condemned them at every opportunity. Then he departed from them.

I suppose we should be grateful to the Pharisees for having led our Lord to utter the trilogy of parables we are about to read. Luke tells us plainly that these three parables, as we commonly speak of them, are really one parable. “He spake this parable
unto them.” In this trilogy of parables, we see the whole work of grace, the whole work of the Triune God in saving lost sinners. The lost sheep shows us the work of Christ, the Son of God, our Good Shepherd, in bringing his elect home to God. The lost coin shows us the work of God the Holy Spirit seeking and finding that which was lost. The prodigal son, the lost son, shows us the wondrous grace and goodness of God the Father in receiving sinners for Christ’s sake.

The Lost Sheep

“And he spake this parable unto them, saying, 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? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoiceing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. 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” (Luke 15:3-7).

What piercing words these must have been to the Pharisees and scribes, who thought they needed no repentance! How sweet they sound in the ears of poor publicans and sinners, who know both that they must have repentance and that they cannot produce it!

Here is a blessed, instructive description of the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in redemption. All God’s elect are sheep, chosen of God and given to Christ as the Good Shepherd, but ever straying from him, lost in the wilderness of fallen humanity. Christ came into this world after his sheep. He seeks each of his sheep until he finds it. When he finds his sheep, he lays it upon his broad, omnipotent shoulders and carries it all the way home. And when he gets home with his sheep there is joy in heaven over every sinner “that repenteth”. Be sure you do not
miss this: The repentance here is not something the sheep does, but something the Shepherd does for the sheep, in the sheep, and with the sheep. He turns the sheep homeward; and he carries the sheep home, all the way home!

The Lost Coin

“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? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:8-10).

Here we see another part of God’s great work of grace. This woman shows us the work of God the Holy Spirit in omnipotent mercy and effectual grace. Unlike the sheep, the coin is an inanimate thing, a thing altogether without life, feeling, or ability, but very precious to the one who has lost it. As such, this lost coin shows a picture of God’s elect in this world, “dead in trespasses and sins”, until God steps in to save (Ephesians 2:1-5).

When God the Holy Spirit comes in grace, he lights the candle of the gospel, causing “the light of the glorious gospel of Christ” to shine in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:4-6). When you sweep a house that has been in darkness for a long time, you stir up a lot of dust. And when God the Holy Spirit performs his mighty operation of grace, he stirs our souls with the broom of conviction. And there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over every repenting sinner. Again, the repentance here is not a work performed by the coin, but the work of God the Holy Spirit finding the coin.

The Lost Son

In verses 11-24 we see the very familiar story of the prodigal
son. Usually, the emphasis is placed upon the son’s rebellion. But our Lord’s purpose in this third part of his parable is to show us the marvellous lovingkindness, infinite mercy, and wondrous grace of God in receiving sinners for Christ’s sake. Here is another picture of God’s elect in their fallen, lost condition by nature. We are all by nature straying sheep, as dead and lifeless as a coin, and utterly profligate rebels. Let us read verses 11-24.

“And he said, 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. 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. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And 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! 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. And he arose, and came to his father. 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. 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. 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: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry” (Luke 15:11-24).

Here is a needy sinner coming to the throne of grace. Here is
God waiting to be gracious. Here is the blessed reception of grace. When poor sinners come home to God, when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, not only does the Lord God run to greet us, fall on our necks and kiss us, he freely gives every repenting sinner all the fulness of his bounteous free grace in Christ Jesus: kisses of love; a robe of righteousness; shoes of stability; a ring (or seal) of sonship; a slain sacrifice to feast upon; and an unceasing celebration of mercy!

The Elder Brother
But the parable does not end here. The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son were all designed to give hope to those poor publicans and sinners who come to the Saviour. The rest of the parable seems specifically intended to condemn the Pharisees and scribes of all ages. They are depicted by the prodigal’s elder brother in verses 25-32.

“No now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. 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. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. 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 gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. 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” (Luke 15:25-32).

This elder brother is not in the house, but in the field. He refuses to come into the house. He is a slave wearing the name
or a son. He is self-righteous. He despises the sacrifice, the robe, and the father. He is full of envy. He has all the ordinances of the father’s house, but none of the blessedness.

Perhaps the most wondrous and most mysterious aspect of this great parable is the way it closes. Only in eternity will we see the fulness of this closing verse manifest. In verse 32 we read — “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.” Here God the Father speaks of himself, all the angels of heaven, and every saved sinner, represented in this prodigal, making merry and being glad, because though we were dead he has given us life, and though we were lost he has found us!

Did he not promise “I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth”? He did indeed (Zephaniah 3:18-20). So it shall be in that great day that is yet to come (Zephaniah 3:14-17; Ephesians 2:1-7).
“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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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
The Parable Of The Unjust Steward

An Illustration
Remember that parables are earthly illustrations of heavenly truths. We do not build our doctrine upon parables. We do not interpret the rest of the Bible in the light of the Lord’s parables. We build our doctrine upon the plain statements of holy scripture. And we interpret the parables of our Lord in the light of the whole Volume of Inspiration.

A parable must not be forced beyond its purpose. The purpose of a parable is to illustrate one primary thing. It has one central message. It is not necessary to give every word of the parable a spiritual or doctrinal meaning. In order to understand it, we must look at the parable as a whole, and seek to determine what its primary message is. In this parable the certain rich man represents the Lord our God. The rich man’s steward represents us all. We are all, in a sense, stewards of God. The message taught in this parable is this: As the stewards of God, you and I are responsible to wisely use what God has put into our hands for his glory and for our own eternal good. This unjust steward was not commended for his injustice, but for his wisdom and great care in using his present circumstances to provide for himself in the future.

Someone has suggested that this world is a house. Heaven is the roof of the house. The stars are its lights. The earth, with its fruits, is a table spread by the Master of the house, who is the great and glorious Lord God. Man is the steward of the house, into whose hands God has given all the goods of his house for a time. It is the steward’s responsibility to use his Master’s goods wisely for the honour of his Master, and according to his
Master’s will. In the Day of Judgment we will be called to give an account of our stewardship.

The message of this parable is a subject of indescribable importance. It is deeper than election, more profound than predestination, and more difficult to receive than Divine sovereignty. You and I are stewards under God, responsible to use what he has put into our hands for the good of his people and the glory of his name, according to his will. If we learn nothing else from this parable, I want us to learn this: Everything (money, material possessions, time, talents, opportunities, family — everything!) we have in this world belongs to God. We are only the stewards of God’s property for a while. He allows us to use that which is his. But it is our responsibility to use it for his glory and according to his direction.

**The Parable Itself**
First, we will briefly look at the parable itself (vv. 1-8).

“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. 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. 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” (Luke 16:1-8).

Here our Lord holds before us a wicked, self-serving, unjust steward. His master trusted him with the goods of his house. But this man used his office and position to cheat his master and his master’s debtors and served himself. As stated above, this unjust steward represents all men and women. God made man to serve him with his creation and honour him. But we have taken that which belongs to God and used it for ourselves. We have all attempted to rob God, both of his dominion and his dignity as God.

It is not accidental that this parable immediately follows the Lord’s story of the elder brother and the parable by which he rebuked the Pharisees and scribes in Luke 15. I am certain that the Pharisees understood both that parable and this one as specifically speaking of them, because they took offence at it (v. 16).

Here are four things that the Lord specifically tells us about this unjust steward …

“He wasted his lord’s goods” (v. 1). This steward embezzled his master’s goods, misapplied them, or through carelessness lost them. And for this, he was accused before his master. This is the charge laid against us all. We have taken that which God has given us to use for his glory, his Son, and his people and wasted it upon our own pleasures.

Because he had wasted his lord’s goods, this steward was given notice that he would soon be put out of his stewardship (v. 2). In a little while he would be required to give up his stewardship and give account of himself to his master. Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke these words against the Pharisees; but he spoke them to his disciples. They are written for our learning. What do they teach us?

Soon we will be compelled to give up our stewardship. Our Lord tells us to “work while it is day, for the night cometh when
no man can work.” We will not always enjoy the privileges and pleasures that are now ours. Death will soon come. When it does, it will deprive us of the abilities and opportunities we now have of serving Christ and his people. And when we are gone, another steward will come to take our place. We will soon be forgotten.

Our discharge from our stewardship is a matter of justice. We must die, because we have sinned. We have wasted our Lord’s goods. Therefore, we have forfeited our stewardship. When the Lord takes it from us, we have no grounds for complaint.

When our stewardship is taken from us, we must give account of it to our Lord (Hebrews 9:27; 2 Corinthians 5:10, 11). Having been warned of these things, if we were wise, we would make preparation for that great day. He is a wise man who says to himself continually, “Prepare to meet thy God.” Soon we must stand before God to give account of our stewardship.

As soon as this unjust steward realized that his stewardship was to be taken from him, he began to make preparations for the appointed day (vv. 3-7). He used the time and opportunities he had to prepare for that appointed day when his stewardship would be taken away. We would be wise to think upon that day. We have been warned. Soon God will take us out of this world. Soon we will stand before God in judgment. We are fools if we do not prepare for that day.

He realized that he had no ability to earn his livelihood, and that he was too proud to beg. “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” (v. 3). He could not dig, because he would not dig. He was not willing to lower himself to what he looked upon as menial labour. He was not too proud to steal. But he was too proud to work! He was too lazy to work and too proud to beg. Both work and humility were
contrary to his nature.

Spiritually, you and I are in the same position he was in. We cannot, by the works of our hands, save our souls. We have neither the will nor the ability to obey God’s law. “By the works of the law there shall no flesh be justified.” “Man is not justified by the works of the law.” Salvation is by grace. It cannot be earned or won by works. Salvation is the free gift of God’s free grace in Christ (Ephesians 2:8, 9). But there is another problem. We are all too proud by nature to beg for mercy. We are too proud to come to God like the publican, upon the footing of free grace through a Substitute (Luke 18:13). We are too proud to seek grace through the merits of another.

Though he was too lazy to work and too proud to beg, this unjust steward determined that he would make friends of his lord’s debtors, so that when he was turned out of his master’s house, he might be received into theirs. This unjust steward was a treacherous, dishonest man. But he was brilliant in one thing. He used the opportunity he had to prepare for his future welfare.

“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” (Luke 16:4-7).

In verse 8 the Lord Jesus tells us that the unjust steward’s master commended his behaviour. “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.”

This is a strange commendation. His lord did not commend him because he had done the things he had done, but because he
had wisely provided for himself. Dishonest as he was, by lessening the bills of his master’s debtors, he made for himself friends. Wicked as he was in his deeds, he had an eye to the future. Disgraceful as his actions were, he provided well for himself. He did not sit still in idleness and wait to be reduced to poverty. He schemed, planned, contrived, and found a way to secure a future home for himself.

Therefore, the Lord Jesus said, “The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.” Do you see the contrast? This man, with regard to earthly things, was diligent. He wisely looked to and provided for the future. This is commendable even in insects and animals (Proverbs 6:6-9; 30:24-28). But, as John Trapp observed, “The worldling’s wisdom serves him (as the ostrich’s wings) to make him outrun others upon earth, and in earthly things; but helps him never a wit toward heaven.”

**Spiritual Things**

Without question, the Book of Proverbs is a book of inspired wisdom drawn from earthly maxims. But the maxims, as given by Solomon, under divine inspiration, are not about carnal matters. They are about spiritual matters. Solomon is not telling us how to lay up treasures upon the earth. That would be a direct contradiction to our Lord’s word in Matthew 6. Solomon’ purpose is to show us the necessity of laying up treasure in heaven.

Yet, how foolish we are to neglect our souls! In this regard the unjust steward sets before us an example we would be wise to follow. Like him, we should look to the future (2 Corinthians 4:18). We would be wise to make provision for that day when we shall have to leave our present habitation and secure for ourselves, by faith in Christ, “an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” We should use every means at our disposal to secure our everlasting welfare.
J. C. Ryle wrote, “The diligence of worldly men about the things of time should put to shame the coldness of professing Christians about the things of eternity.” They improve their opportunities. We waste ours. They redeem their time. We squander ours. They seize the moment to increase their riches. We live as if we expect to live here forever, as though there were no eternal riches in glory.

**Christ’s Exhortation**

Second, I want us to understand the exhortation our Lord Jesus gives us in verse 9. The parable ends in verse 8. Verses 9-13 are words of instruction to you and me, by which our Saviour pointedly applies the parable to us. “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” (v. 9).

This is the meaning of our Lord’s words in this verse: Make to yourselves friends with your money and earthly goods, so that when you die, you may enter into everlasting habitations. Use your earthly goods, as stewards under God, with an eye to the future. Use your riches in this world in such a way that they shall be friends to you and not a witness against you in the Day of Judgment.

Lest any mistake what I am saying, or what our Lord is teaching in this verse, let this be perfectly understood. No man can purchase an eternal inheritance in heaven with money, any more than he can earn it by his works. Our only grounds of acceptance with God is the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-21). Your earthly riches cannot get you into heaven, no matter what you do with them. But your earthly riches can keep you out of heaven (Matthew 13:22; Luke 18:22-24). It is our responsibility not to serve our earthly possessions, but rather to use our earthly possessions to serve our God, his people, and his gospel. All that we have belongs to God and is to be used for
God. We are nothing but stewards. A steward takes in with one hand and distributes with the other according to his master’s will (Matthew 6:19-21, 33). We were not put here to amass wealth, but to use what God puts in our hands for the glory of Christ and the good of his people.

The doctrine our Lord teaches us by this parable is unmistakable. The proper use of our earthly goods, from the proper motives, will be for our eternal benefit. It is an evidence of God’s grace in us, which shall befriend our souls forever. God the Holy Spirit has given us three inspired commentaries on our Lord’s exhortation in Luke 16:9.

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days” (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:7-10).

“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” (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

“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” (Luke 16:9).

**Faithful, Or Unfaithful?**

Third, our Lord gives us the basis of this exhortation and
enforces it in verses 10-12. If we do not make good use of God’s temporal gifts of providence, we need not expect him to bestow upon us the true riches of spiritual and everlasting grace and glory. “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” (v. 10).

The riches of this world are called that which is least. Men think riches are great, significant, and all-important. Our Lord calls riches that which is least, the very least of all God’s gifts to man. The spiritual riches, the riches of grace and glory are much, infinitely, immeasurably much. These are “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8) and “God’s riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19).

Matthew Henry said, “God withholds his grace from covetous worldly people more than we are aware of.” And our Lord said virtually the same thing in Luke 18:25.

“If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?” (v. 11) The riches of this world are deceitful and uncertain. They are “the unrighteous mammon”. Spiritual riches are “true riches”. I wonder if we really believe that. Those who are rich in faith are truly rich. Those who are rich in grace are infinitely rich. Those who are rich towards God are permanently rich. Those who are rich in Christ are perfectly rich and rich in all things (1 Corinthians 3:21). In Christ all providential things are ours, all temporal things are ours, all gracious things are ours, all spiritual things are ours, and all eternal things are ours.

“And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?” (v. 12). The riches of this world are another man’s. They all belong to God. We are only stewards of them, who use them for a very little while. Then, we must leave them to another. Spiritual, eternal riches are our own. They are that good part which shall not be taken away from us, neither in this world nor in the world to
come. That which God has imputed to me is mine forever. That which he imparts to my soul can never be separated from me. It is my very own forever. Christ’s righteousness is our righteousness (Jeremiah 33:16). His reward is our reward (Colossians 1:12). His inheritance is our inheritance (Romans 8:17). And his glory is our glory (John 17:20).

Little Things
In these verses, our Lord plainly shows us the importance of faithfulness in little things. He is showing us that little things are the truest tests of character. A man who will steal a dime will rob a bank, if he thinks he can get away with it. A woman who will gossip about you would murder you, if she could. A person who is not faithful in little things is really unfaithful in all things. And he certainly is not an heir of heavenly things. Yet, it must be understood that faithfulness is not measured by acts, but by lives. David failed greatly in some areas; but he was a faithful steward in God’s house.

Our Lord’s Lesson
Fourth, our Saviour sets before us a lesson we must learn. “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” (v. 13). As Matthew Henry rightly observed, “We have no other way to prove ourselves the servants of God than by giving up ourselves so entirely to his service as to make mammon, that is, all our worldly gain, serviceable to us in his service.”

If we love the world and seek to hold on to the things of the world, we will hate God and despise his grace. Our worship of, service to, and faith in God will be made to be subservient to our worldly interests. We will use the things of God to serve the world.

If we love God and seek to hold on to him, serving his
kingdom and his glory, his Son and his gospel, then we will hate the world and despise all that it offers. That simply means, when the world comes into competition with God, we throw the world away and hold our God and Saviour (Luke 14:25-33). We make our business and worldly interests subservient to the worship of, obedience to, and service for our God. We make the things of the world to be neither more nor less than instruments with which we serve the Lord our God.

“Ye cannot serve God and mammon”! So I say to you as Joshua did to Israel of old, “How long halt ye between two opinions? … Choose you this day whom ye will serve.” As for me and my house, I have made up my mind, “We will serve the Lord”!

“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. 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. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Mark 8:34-37).
Chapter 14

“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. 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. The law and the prophets were until John: since
that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man
presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass,
than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his
wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever
marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth

“That Which Is Highly Esteemed Among Men”

Single Heart
The Lord Jesus concluded his parable of the unjust steward with
these words, “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”
(v. 13). The lesson he declares is unmistakable: if we would
worship and serve our God, we must worship him and serve him
with a single, undivided heart.

“The Lord looketh on the heart.” In all things concerning
faith in Christ, obedience to our God, and worship, the heart is the principle thing (Proverbs 4:23; 23:26). “The Lord looketh on the heart.” “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart” he will not despise. The one thing he requires of all who come to him in faith is the heart, a sincere, single, undivided heart. The heart was the one thing lacking in the rich young ruler. The heart was the thing the Scribes and Pharisees would not give. The heart is the one thing none will give to God, except the Lord God create a broken, contrite, single, undivided heart in us by his omnipotent grace. Faith in Christ is the surrender of myself to him. It is giving up my life to him. Faith in Christ is not a partial consecration, but the entire consecration of myself to my God. Read the scriptures for yourself and understand the doctrine of Christ. Where there is no consecration, there is no conversion. Where there is no surrender, there is no salvation. Where there is no voluntary bowing to Christ as Lord, there is no knowledge of Christ as Saviour (Luke 14:26-33; Mark 8:34-37).

The plain and simple fact is “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.” We are not the servants of God, we do not trust Christ as our Lord, if we do not give up ourselves so entirely to his service as to make mammon, that is, all our worldly gain, serviceable to his kingdom, his will, and his glory.

If we love the world and seek to hold on to the things of the world, we will hate God and despise his grace. Our worship of, service to, and faith in God will be made to be subservient to our worldly interests. We will use the things of God to serve the world.

If we love God and seek to hold on to him, serving his kingdom and his glory, his Son and his gospel, then we will hate the world and despise all that it offers. That simply means that when the world comes into competition with God, we throw the
world away and hold our God and Saviour. We make our
business and worldly interests subservient to the worship of,
obedience to, and service for our God. We make the things of
the world to be neither more nor less than instruments with
which we serve the Lord God.

It is a useless show of hypocrisy to claim that we are
worshippers and servants of God, when in reality we only serve
ourselves. God in heaven cannot be served with a divided heart.
That is so obviously revealed in the New Testament that dispute
regarding it would seem to be unthinkable. Yet, multitudes in
this world try to do the thing our Master declares is impossible.
They try to be friends of the world and friends of God at the
same time.

Does that describe you? Your conscience forces you to be
religious. But your heart is chained to earthly things. You live in
constant unrest. You have too much religion to be happy in the
world and too much of the world in your heart to be happy in
religion. You labour to do that which cannot be done. You are
striving to “serve God and mammon”.

Whole-hearted, decisive faith is what our Lord requires.
Whole-hearted, decisive faith is the key to contentment and
peace in this world. Half-heartedness brings up an evil report of
the good land and of God’s promise. Whole-hearted faith in
Christ, like Caleb, is of another spirit and follows the Lord fully,
saying, “The Lord will bring us into this land and give it to us.”

J. C. Ryle said, “The more entirely we live, not to ourselves,
but to him who died for us, the more powerfully shall we realize
what it is to have ‘joy and peace in believing’ (Romans 15:13).
If it is worthwhile to serve Christ at all, let us serve him with all
our heart, and soul, and mind and strength … If we cannot make
up our minds to give up everything for Christ’s sake, we must
not expect Christ to own us at the last day. He will have all our
hearts or none. ‘Whoever will be a friend of the world is the
enemy of God’ (James 4:4). The end of undecided and half-
hearted Christians will be to be cast out forever.”

Sneering Religionists
When the scribes and Pharisees heard our Lord’s parable of the unjust steward and the conclusion he drew from it, “they derided him”. These lost religionists turned up their noses in contempt at our Saviour’s doctrine. “And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him” (v. 14).

When the Pharisees, a money-loving, money-obsessed bunch of religionists, heard the Master say these things, they rolled their eyes, dismissing him as hopelessly out of touch. These covetous men, these lovers of the world, turned up their noses, made faces at the Son of God, and sneered at him. They laughed and scoffed at his doctrine. These men professed to be, and everyone highly regarded them as being lovers of God; but that which was the master passion of their hearts was the love of the world. “These men”, wrote G. Campbell Morgan, “were filled with scorn for this poor, Galilean peasant who talked like that about money. To them, the teaching Jesus had been giving was so preposterous that they could not restrain their mockery.”

There are many in pulpits and churches around the world today of the same opinion. They are moral. They are religious. But they tell us that such things as our Lord here emphatically declares are not practical. What blasphemy there is in the use of that word “practical”! When religious people talk about “being practical”, “teaching practical things”, “practical doctrine”, and “practical godliness”, what they usually mean is: “We’ve heard enough about Christ and his gospel. That no longer appeals to us”! When they talk about devotion and consecration to the Son of God as something “excessive” and “impractical”, they are only attempting to cover their own rebellion, self-interests, and love of the world. Nothing in all the world is more reasonable and practical than the whole-hearted consecration of our lives to our God and Saviour (Romans 12:1, 2). That man or woman
who loves the world, no matter how religious he or she may be, betray themselves by the object of their affection (1 John 2:15-17).

**A Biting Reply**

The Master had already stung their consciences. They knew he had been talking about them. And, now in verse 15 our Saviour gives a biting reply to their sneers. God sees right through the mask of hypocrisy. He knows every man’s heart. “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.”

Hiding behind the mask of religious devotion, these men passed themselves off as being great lovers of God and of his law. But their religion was nothing but a mask to hide their covetousness, their love of all that can be gained in this world. Here, our Lord unmasked the Pharisees publicly. In essence, he is saying, “You are masters at making yourselves look good in front of others, but God knows what’s behind the appearance. What society sees and calls “monumental”, God sees through and calls “monstrous”. In doing so, he gives us two, sobering lessons, if we have ears to hear them. First, “God knoweth your hearts.” Second, “That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.”

That which is high in the estimation of men is an abomination in the sight of God. That is to say, those who attempt to justify themselves by their works, ever making a show of religion and godliness before men, are a stench in the nostrils of God in heaven, who knows their hearts.

They are a stench in his nostrils, and all their religion is a stench in his nostrils. Their religion and holiness, their devotion and ceremonies, their zeal and their prayers are a stench to God! Everything by which they gain the applause of men as “holy, devoted, godly people”, everything by which they gain the
world they covet is an abomination to God.

What was our Lord referring to here? Did he have anything specific in mind? Hear his own words and see …

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. 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 you, They have their reward. 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” (Matthew 6:1-4).

“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. 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. 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” (Matthew 6:5-8).

“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. 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” (Matthew 6:16-18).

“Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes 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. 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. 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 synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren” (Matthew 23:1-8).

“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” (Matthew 23:15).

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, 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. 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” (Matthew 23:23-25).

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whitened 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” (Matthew 23:27, 28).

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, 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. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers,
how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Matthew 23:29-33).

God’s opinion of a man’s goodness and his own opinion of his goodness are not quite the same. Your opinion of your righteousness and God’s opinion of it are as different as heaven and hell (Isaiah 1:10-15; 65:2-5). God loves what men despise: mercy, grace, lovingkindness, and faith. And men love what God despises: a form of godliness, a religious show, and the praise of men.

“Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and men will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself. He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish” (Psalm 49:16-20).

Legalists And The Law

In verses 16-18 our Lord exposes the legalists’ contempt for God’s holy law. While all legalists denounce as antinomian those faithful men who proclaim the believer’s complete freedom from the law (Romans 6:14, 15; 7:4; 8:1-4; 10:4; Galatians 5:1-4; Colossians 2:8, 16, 20), the fact is all who claim to live by the law would destroy the law. It is the legalist who is the antinomian, the one who is against the law.

All who want you to believe that they are holy, that they live by the law of God and make themselves holy by their obedience to God really despise the law and endeavour to destroy it by lowering it to their level. This is exactly what our Lord charged against the Pharisees and all their followers in these three verses.

Legalists love to show their obedience to the law, though they despise it inwardly. How often we hear legalists say, “If I didn’t believe I was still under the law, I could go out and live any way I wanted to.” With such assertions they betray their
hatred of the law; and by their own words they are judged. Believers delight in the law after the inward man.

A New Age
Our Saviour declares in verse 16 that the law and the prophets have now been fulfilled and a new age has begun. “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.” In the strictest sense, the law and the prophets were not fulfilled until Christ died and rose again. But John the Baptist appeared as the forerunner of the Christ, preparing the way before him, announcing the beginning of this present gospel age. Since the day John the Baptist pointed to him and cried, “Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world”, the types and shadows of the law have been fulfilled.

The kingdom of God no longer has any connection with meats, and drinks, and ceremonies, and bondage. It is not outward, but inward. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17). In this gospel age we do not call men and women to duties and ceremonies, but to Christ himself, preaching the kingdom of God.

The law portrayed eternal things in the words of temporal things and spiritual things by carnal things. The gospel deals only with the spiritual and the eternal. The old things of the legal age have passed away. We are no longer looking for a kingdom to come, but proclaiming a kingdom established, and pressing men and women into it. The Church of God is the Kingdom of God, a kingdom established by Christ, a kingdom established upon righteousness, a kingdom of which Christ is the King, a kingdom of grace, and an everlasting kingdom.

Pressing In
In the last line of verse 16 we read, “the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.” What do those words
mean? Certainly, our Lord does not mean for us to understand that all men are trying to get into his kingdom. These Pharisees were not! They not only would not enter the kingdom, they did everything they could to block others from entering, just as our modern religionists do by their traditions, ceremonies, altar calls, scripted prayers, and displays of piety.

So what does it mean? The word translated “presseth” in verse 16 is used in only one other place in the New Testament (Matthew 11:12). It means, as it is translated in Matthew, “suffereth violence”. Everyone who enters the Kingdom of God strives to enter in at the strait gate. He strives against all the religion and religious duties, against all the saying of prayers and doing of penance, against all the laws and ceremonies, by which lost religionists would keep them from Christ.

Word Fulfilled

In verse 17 our Lord declares that the Word of God stands and must be fulfilled in every detail. “And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail.” Apply these words to the Mosaic law or to the whole of divine revelation in the Old Testament, or to both. They mean exactly the same thing. Our Lord is here declaring, lest any foolishly say (as many do) that since they are fulfilled, the law and the prophets have been destroyed. Fulfilled is not destroyed, but fulfilled. As all the law was exactly fulfilled, so every Word of God stands forever. Not one word written in the Book of God shall fall to the ground. God’s Word is sure and unalterable!

With regard to God’s holy law, the preaching of the Kingdom of God (the preaching of the gospel) does not lessen it, or destroy it. Not at all! The preaching of the gospel maintains the utter severity, strictness, and justice of the law, and its fulfilment by Christ as our Substitute (Romans 3:24-26; 8:1-4; 9:33-10:4).
**Committeth Adultery**

To enforce what he says in verse 17, our Lord declares to these self-righteous, self-serving, mean-spirited legalists that the specific law they were most flagrantly guilty of perverting, violating and trying to destroy means exactly the same thing today as it did when Moses wrote it in Deuteronomy 24. “Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery” (v. 18).

The Word of God is crystal clear. Marriage is the lifelong union of a man and a woman (Genesis 1:27; 24). Any man or woman who breaks that union, except upon the grounds of or because of adultery or abandonment (Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:1-9; 1 Corinthians 7:15), and marries another commits adultery.

The Pharisees were flagrant in their disregard of God’s law in this regard. The famous rabbi Hillel, who lived during the days of Herod I, asserted that a man had the right to divorce his wife if she burned his food! Another rabbi (Akiba) taught that a man could divorce his wife if he found a woman who was prettier!

So commonly and easily did the Pharisees divorce their wives and marry another that when our Lord’s disciples heard what he had to say about it, they were shocked. They said, “If the case of the man be so with his wife”, if a man cannot put away his wife for any and every cause as the Pharisees do (Matthew 19:3), “it is not good to marry” (Matthew 19:10).

Does that sound familiar? All this looseness and laxity, all this contempt for God’s law was promoted by men who pretended to be lovers of it and zealous for it, while they lowered it to their own level. In reality, they were men who simply used religion and God and the Bible to gratify their own lusts, promote their own praise, and secure their high esteem in the eyes of men.
Why here?
Many seem to have great difficulty trying to figure out why the Lord Jesus said what he did in verse 18 in this context. They think it is out of place, that it has nothing to do with the parable in verses 1-13, the comments in verses 14-17, or the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in verses 19-31.

They are all mistaken. In verse 18 our Lord sticks his finger right on the ever-swelling chest of every proud legalist, exposing his hypocrisy, and says, “Like the unjust steward, you live for yourself. Your religion, your great piety, that you think will get you into heaven is carrying you rapidly, headlong into hell. And, soon, you who are so rich in your own eyes will lift up your eyes in hell and see all God’s poor Lazarus’s, all these publicans and sinners who trust me alone for acceptance with God, these who come to me at mercy’s open gate as poor, needy beggars seeking grace, these who feed with me at the Father’s bounteous table, these you will see in all the riches of heavenly glory with me. Then, then, you will remember your imaginary riches and good things to the everlasting torment of your souls.”

Hear the words of the Son of God and flee to him for mercy, trusting him alone as your righteousness. “For I say 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” (Matthew 5:20). Oh, poor, guilty, needy sinner, come to Christ as a filthy, empty handed, naked beggar and find in him the righteousness that God requires. Everything God requires is in him. And God gives it freely to all who need it (1 Corinthians 1:30, 31).
Chapter 15

“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. 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. 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. 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” (Luke 16:19-31).

Seven Lessons Learned Too Late
The Lord Jesus is continuing to address religious Pharisees, those who justify themselves before men. He said to them in verse 15, “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.”

These are the people to whom the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son was spoken in chapter 15. In that parable they are described as the elder brother who despised the goodness and grace of God, by which poor sinners are saved. They scorned the Lord Jesus saying, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (15:2). It is specifically to all who attempt to justify themselves before men, to all who despise the grace of God in Christ that the story in Luke 16:19-31 is addressed.

**A Great Change**
The first thing we see in this parable is the fact that eternity brings about a great change. Things were not the same for the rich man after he died; and things were not the same for Lazarus (vv. 19-24). The Lord Jesus tells us, “There was a certain rich man”, a certain, notable, distinguished man, who thought himself rich before God and was highly esteemed as such, “which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day”, a man who never had a trouble in his soul. “And there was a certain”, poor, helpless “beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores”, full of trouble, “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 was forgotten. “And in hell he lift up his eyes,
being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 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.”

What great changes are made when breath is taken from our bodies! Here are two men. One was very rich, and the other very poor. The one “fared sumptuously every day.” The other was a “beggar … full of sores”, who had nothing that he could call his own. Yet, it was Lazarus, the poor beggar, who possessed all things, who was born of God, and had true riches in Christ. The rich man though clothed in purple and fine linen (long robes, showing himself to be a distinctly righteous man) had nothing. Lazarus, the poor man, lived by faith and walked in the steps of Abraham. The rich man was a thoughtless, self-righteous, selfish worldling, dead in trespasses and sins. While on earth, the rich man was at the top of the world and Lazarus on the bottom. Now, Lazarus is above in glory and the rich man below in hell.

We should never imagine that men are blessed because they are wealthy, in good health, and appear to be happy. That which appears to be the blessing of God is often his curse. And we must never imagine that those who are poor, plagued with disease, and troubled are unbelieving and cursed. Earthly woe is often an indication of Divine favour.

“Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 9:23, 24).

Wealth and worldly honour are not marks of God’s favour. Poverty and adversity are not marks of God’s displeasure. Those whom God justifies and glorifies are seldom the rich and honourable of this world.
One End
Learn this, too: death is the common end of all men. The trials of the “beggar” and the sumptuous living of the “rich man”, both ceased at the appointed hour. At God’s appointed time, both men died. Both went to the grave. As Solomon tells us, “All go to one place” (Ecclesiastes 3:20). You and I are dying creatures. Few like to think about it, but it is a fact. Soon we must die (Hebrews 9:27). Death is the one thing that is common to all. Yet, most people eat, and drink, and talk, and plan as if they were going to live in this world forever. How foolish! Someone once said, “He that would live well should often think of his last day, and make it his company-keeper.” Here is an epitaph left on a tombstone long ago …

Please view my tomb as you pass by,  
As you are now, so once was I;  
And as I am now soon you shall be —,  
So make your plans to follow me.

“The beggar died”, and his pains, sorrows, and needs died. “The rich man also died”, and his sumptuous living, all his delight, all his wealth died! “Prepare to meet thy God”!

Blessed Prospect
This parable is also intended to assure us that for God’s elect the death of this body is a blessed prospect. In that hour all men dread, believers are specially and tenderly cared for by God. The Lord Jesus tells us that when Lazarus died, he “was carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom.”

I find something very precious and comforting in this expression. We know very little, if anything, about the true, inward experiences of dying people. But this much is certain: “Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord”! “To be absent from
the body is to be present with the Lord”! “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”

Those who sleep in Jesus are in good keeping. They are not disembodied spirits, floating around in the atmosphere. While their bodies sleep in the earth awaiting the resurrection they are at rest among friends in Abraham’s bosom, at the feet of Christ, the Lamb upon his throne. They have no want of any kind. Best of all, Paul tells us they are “with Christ” (Philippians 1:23). Truly, for the believer, “to die is gain”. No wonder Paul wrote as he did about things temporal and things eternal in 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:9.

The End
Here we are allowed to see the ultimate end of all, the righteous and the unrighteous, the believing and the unbelieving. Soon, very soon, you and I will join one of these two men. We will join Lazarus in heavenly glory, or we will join the rich man in hell. This is the end of all men. May God give us wisdom and grace to lay to our hearts the things he lays before us in this portion of his Word.  

Lazarus died and was carried up to heaven. Chosen, redeemed, and born of God, he entered into glory. But “the rich man also died”! What became of him?

“In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments”! Here, the Lord God allows us to look beyond the grave. He allows us to look into hell itself. He shows us the pains, feelings, and desires of an eternally lost, damned soul in hell, one who is forever shut up in hell under the torment of God’s infinite, holy, justice and

5 “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth” (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4).
wrath.

**Trust Christ**

Are you ready to die? Are you prepared to meet your God? Oh, how I pray that God will grant you grace and cause you to flee his wrath and find refuge in Christ, that he will save you from the wrath to come, lest at last you find your place with the damned in hell!⁶

If you would escape the fires of hell, you must give up and forsake your imaginary, pretended goodness. That which we think is goodness in ourselves is only the self-delusion of self-righteousness. That which we perceive as goodness in others is the biased perception of people who think someone must be good, because we have benefited in some way from their kindness, love, and generosity to us. The Word of God declares, “There is none righteous … There is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Romans 3:10-12). In fact, even David, the man after God’s own heart, said to the Lord his God, “My goodness extendeth not unto Thee” (Psalm 16:2).

Your goodness will never take you to heaven. Your goodness is nothing but horrible sin under a pretty mask, hatred for God under a cloak of decency, and putrefying rottenness under the cover of religious perfume.

If you and I would be saved, if we would stand accepted before God and be accepted by him in his presence forever, we must have a goodness, a righteousness that is worthy of God’s approval. A religious decision will do you no good. Religious morality will profit you nothing. Saying, “I believe in Jesus”, will not save you. Saying “the sinners’ prayer” will only add to your condemnation.

⁶ Most people think nothing of saying to another, “Go to hell.” — If they had any idea what they were saying, I think that even the most profane man on the face of the earth would tremble at the thought of wishing such a horrible thing upon another.
If you would be saved, you must know the Lord God himself. “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” You and I cannot be saved unless we know Christ, unless we are made to be the very righteousness of God in Christ. You know that is true. Your conscience verifies these things. You may not like them. You may suppress them until you perish in hell. But you cannot deny them. This is what God demands from you and me: perfect satisfaction (atonement) (Hebrews 9:22) and perfect righteousness (Matthew 5:20).

We cannot give him either. These things are to be had only by the obedience and death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the sinners’ Substitute. They are ours only if we trust the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sooner or later, you will learn these things are true. I wonder if you will learn it before it is too late. Most do not. Here in Luke 16 is a man who learned everything too late. He did not learn them until he was in hell.

Lessons Learned In Hell
The passage before us has a very sobering distinction that separates it from all others. This is the only place in the entire Bible (the only place in the world) in which we learn anything at all about the thoughts and emotions of the damned in hell. Here are seven things that the rich man learned. But he learned them too late. He learned them in hell. I pray that you who read these lines will not learn them too late.

1. As soon as he died, this rich man discovered that death does not end all. “If a man die, shall he live again?” Indeed, we shall. We all have an immortal soul that will live on forever, after our bodies are in the grave (Mark 8:36, 37). Will you spend eternity in the bliss and glory of heaven or in the torments of the damned in hell? What a meeting place hell will be for lost neighbours, for a lost daughter and her lost mother, a lost son
and his lost father, a lost church member and his lost pastor

2. This poor soul also learned that there is a real place called “hell”. Hell is as real as Danville, Kentucky. The same Inspired Book that tells us about heaven and the eternal bliss of the redeemed tells us about hell and the eternal misery of the damned. The Lord Jesus tells us plainly that after death the rich man was “in hell ... tormented with fire”. What a fearful picture he gives us. This lost soul in hell longed and begged for a drop of “water to cool his tongue.” He was tormented in flames. There was “a great gulf fixed” between him and Abraham, which could not be crossed.

J. C. Ryle wrote, “There are few more dreadful passages perhaps in the whole Bible than this. And he from whose lips it came, be it remembered, was one who delighted in mercy”!

I do not know where it is, and I cannot imagine what it is, but hell is a real place. The rich man found out too late that hell is not a myth. Hell is a place of unquenchable fire, undying worms, inescapable torment, everlasting darkness, unending hopelessness, and eternal, conscious separation from God and all that is good! Nathan Terrell said:

“To say Hell is a horrible place is an understatement. Most people think of Hell as the farthest point from God. It is the caves where Satan’s minions scamper about, poking feeble folk with tiny pikes and taunting them for all eternity. As bad as this seems, it does not even compare to what Hell really is. Hell is the very presence of God and his wrath without Christ as a Mediator. Hell is the ‘place’ where men face God without a Saviour, without anybody to pay their debt of sin. If you thought Satan’s minions were scary, imagine being face to face with all God’s wrath with no Jesus in sight.”

3. Lifting up his eyes in hell, this rich man found out what he tried his best to ignore all his life, that a holy God must and will punish sin.

It is written, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die”! God is so
inflexibly just and holy that when he found sin upon his own dear Son he poured out his infinite wrath upon him. And he who punished his Son for sin will certainly punish you for sin, if your sin is not removed by his Son.

4. The rich man found out that hell is a place of endless torment. He cried, “I am tormented in this flame”! Hell is a place of lust and desire unfulfilled, a place of mental, moral, and physical agony. When I try to imagine what the torments of the damned in hell must be, I am shocked by what I know, and quake because I realize that what I know is nothing in comparison with what those torments actually are! Unspeakable torments! Endless torments! All I can do is cry out to poor, lost sinners, “Flee! Flee! Flee away to Christ, lest you fall into hell and the torments of the damned”!

The Names
What dreadful names are used to describe that place in the Book of God! It is called a place where the worm dieth not (Mark 9). It is called a burning oven (Malachi 4:1). It is called a fiery-furnace (Matthew 13). It is called the bottomless pit, the unquenchable fire, fire and brimstone, hell fire, the lake of fire, devouring fire, everlasting fire, eternal fire, a stream of fire (Revelation 21), and “the second death”.

The Torments
The torments of the damned are unthinkable. In hell you will have full sight and knowledge of your condition. All your senses will be fully awakened. You will have a full sight and knowledge of your wasted life, from first to last. “Son, remember”! (v. 25).

The guilt of all your sin will lay heavily upon your soul. There will be no pleasure in sin for a season in hell, but only torment. Who can imagine the agony of a tormented conscience, fully awake? It will be a worm that dies not and a fire that is not
quenched forever!

When God lays judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet, when the hail of fire and brimstone sweeps away your refuge of lies, when the waters of God’s horrible wrath overflow your hiding place, and your covenant with death is disannulled, your covenant with death shall not stand. When the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then you shall be trodden down by it (Isaiah 28:17, 18). Then shall be brought to your never ceasing remembrance the fact that you are in hell, that you are damned because you despised Christ and his gospel, because you refused to hear his word of grace, because you rejected that one Foundation laid in Zion. What a vexation your awakened memory will be to your lost soul forever in hell (Isaiah 28:14-20; Proverbs 1:23-33).

5. Though he was forever confined to hell’s dark prison of torment, the damned rich man saw Lazarus in the bliss of heaven’s glory. Yes, the damned in hell see their friends, families, neighbours, mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, children, and those they despised on earth in the kingdom of heaven, and themselves cast out forever (Luke 13:28).

In hell your only company will be the damned, the damned angels, the damned sons of men, the damned like yourself, a vast company of men and demons who hate you as fully as you hate them, screeching and roaring so insidiously that they drive you mad, mad forever, and your madness will be madness without hope of relief!

6. In hell God Almighty will lay upon you all the fulness of his unmitigated wrath, without mercy. He will punish you with everlasting destruction from his presence and glory (2 Thessalonians 1:9). In this condition you must be forever (Revelation 20:6).

Perhaps the greatest torment of all is what is described in the last line of Luke 16:23. In hell the rich man saw “Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.” He saw Abraham and all the
blessedness of covenant grace fulfilled in him. He saw Abraham and those blessings “afar off”. And he saw “Lazarus in his bosom”, possessing and enjoying all the blessings of covenant grace!

7. In hell this poor, lost soul learned, but learned too late, that Christ is the only way of salvation.

The rich man’s riches, religion and works were of no value to him in hell. Missing Christ, he lost all! Christ alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He alone is Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. There is no salvation except by faith in him.

In hell the rich man learned, but learned too late, except a man repent he will surely perish.

In hell this man realized that without repentance there is no salvation (v. 30). In hell he saw nothing temporal is of any real value. In hell he learned that nothing really matters except Christ and faith in him, that all else is vanity.

One more thing that this rich man learned in hell, but learned too late, is this: no one can ever be saved without hearing and believing the gospel (vv. 28-31).

Gospel preaching is the catalyst God uses to give life to chosen, redeemed sinners by the mighty operations of his Holy Spirit (Romans 1:16; 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25). A catalyst is an agent of action. If a chemist desires to unite two substances to create another, in many cases, a catalyst is necessary. The catalyst does not cause the union and never enters into the union of those substances. But without the presence of that specific catalyst, the union would never take place and could not continue. That is exactly what the preaching of the gospel is in God’s savings operations.

Without question, were it his pleasure to do so, God Almighty could have chosen to save sinners without the use of any means or agency of any kind. Had he chosen to do so, he could have sent angels to pull us into heaven by our noses, once
atonement was made for us. But that is not his pleasure.

The Lord God has chosen to regenerate and call chosen, redeemed sinners through the agency of gospel preaching. The fact that God has so ordained it makes the preaching of the gospel the catalyst necessary for the communication of his saving grace.

I know that many cry out against this and say, “That limits God’s sovereignty. That makes salvation depend upon man.” Do not be so foolish as to be found fighting against God.

We must never force the scriptures to mean what we want them to mean. We must never bend the Word of God to our doctrinal notions and theological system. Rather, we bow to God’s Word. We cannot extol and honour God if we refuse to submit our reason to his Revelation.

Carefully read the scriptures once more. It is impossible to read the following passages in their context without concluding that regeneration and faith in Christ, gifts of God the Holy Spirit and operations of his irresistible grace are communicated to chosen sinners through the instrumentality of gospel preaching (Romans 1:15-17; 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Timothy 4:12-16; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23-25). In each of those passages the Lord God plainly declares that it is his purpose and pleasure to save his elect through the preaching of the gospel.

Perhaps you think, “What if one of God’s elect is in a remote barbarian tribe in the jungles of New Guinea where no gospel preacher has ever been?” I can see how that would create a problem, except for one thing, there are no problems with God! He knows exactly how to get his prophet to the people to whom he has purposed to show his mercy. Just ask Jonah!

We preach the gospel with a sense of urgency, knowing that sinners cannot believe on Christ until Christ is preached to them. Yet, we preach with confidence of success, knowing that our labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). God’s
Word will not return to him void. It will accomplish his will and prosper in the thing it is sent to do (Isaiah 55:11). Every chosen, redeemed sinner must be regenerated and called by the Holy Spirit. And that work will be accomplished through the preaching of the gospel.

Be wise, believe the gospel, trust Christ lest you also perish forever under the wrath of God.
Chapter 16

“Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! 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. 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. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith” (Luke 17:1-5).

Strong Doctrine

These few verses contain the strongest doctrine set forth in holy scripture. Here are the deep things of God. There is nothing here but strong meat. By comparison, the things taught here make predestination, election, reprobation, limited atonement, and efficacious grace appear to be mere milk for newborn babies in the kingdom of God.

Certain Offences

“What said he unto the disciples.” The Master is addressing his disciples, those who trust him, believe his doctrine, follow his Word, serve him and seek to honour him. Our Lord’s words, then, are to you and me, people who profess to be his disciples, who claim to be washed in his blood, robed in his righteousness,
and saved by his grace. Now, watch what he says …

“It is impossible but that offences will come.” What are the offences he is talking about? How is it that these offences must come? Let me answer the second question first.

Offences must come because God has purposed them and has purposed to use them and overrule them for the salvation and everlasting good of his elect and the glory of his own great name. Multitudes are of the opinion expressed by Charles Finney in his sermon on this text. Finney said, “The doctrine of this text is that sin, under the government of God, cannot be prevented.” Of course, Finney’s assertion is utter blasphemy. To suggest that there is something, anything beyond the absolute control of God is to deny Godhood altogether. The scriptures declare, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psalm 76:10). Our God asserts, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things” (Isaiah 45:7).

Offences come because God has purposed that they come for the benefit of his elect; and offences must come because by these things the Lord God distinguishes true believers from false professors (1 Corinthians 11:19; Acts 20:30; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Peter 1:1, 2).

What are the offences our Lord has in mind in this passage? What are these offences that must come? The word that is translated offences means “stumbling blocks”, “things that cause people to fall”. It is a word that we would use to refer to the trigger device that makes the trap door of a snare catch its victim.

We must read these words in their context. They immediately follow the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Our Lord is talking about offences that deceive the soul, offences that carry eternity bound men and women to hell. The offences our Lord is talking about here are not mere hurt feelings or injured pride, but damning heresies like those of the
Judaisers at Galatia and the will-worshippers at Colosse. And the offences in this passage certainly include behaviour that leads others to ruin. The scriptures make it clear that the offences of one generation are visited upon succeeding generations in divine judgment (Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:8; Deuteronomy 5:9).

The whole world is a stumbling-block. There is not one thing in it which is not calculated to turn the heart from God. The dress, the vanities and vulgarities in the street, the political and educational systems, the flatteries of men, the fame and riches the world offers, and its religion, all tend to elevate the flesh, as in the case of the rich man in the parable.

**Christ’s Warning**

“But woe unto him, through whom they come! 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.” Our Lord Jesus here refers to an ancient form of capital punishment reserved for only the most reprehensible criminals. He is saying that it would be better for a man to be guilty of any horrid crime, for which men are justly executed, than to be guilty of causing another to perish in hell.

Who are “these little ones?” Again, the answer must be determined by the context. The little ones of whom our Lord is speaking here are those poor, despised publicans and sinners, who were sitting before him. Our Saviour has been talking to the scribes and Pharisees, who despised these little ones and would by their religion shut them out of heaven. Now, as he addresses his disciples, he waves his hand over the sinners sitting before him and says, “Woe unto him, through whom they come! 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.”

When do men cause “offences” to come? Certainly this is
done any time they persecute believers, or endeavour to deter others from serving Christ. And offences come by heretical doctrine, which subverts the souls of men. But offences are not limited to such actions. We lay snares by which Satan traps the souls of many whenever we bring reproach upon the gospel by our behaviour.

That was the result of David’s sin when he took Bathsheba and had Uriah killed (2 Samuel 12:14). “Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.” That was the crime Paul laid against the Jews, when he said, “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you” (Romans 2:24). Let us take care that we give no offence to eternity bound sinners, that we lay no snare before them, that we destroy none (1 Corinthians 10:31, 32).

Forgiveness

“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.” Here our Lord moves on to another of the deep things of God. He warns us to carefully avoid giving offence to eternity bound men and women in verses 1 and 2. In verses 3 and 4 he tells us (his disciples, you and me, all who believe the gospel) not to take offence at the actions of our brothers and sisters in the family of God.

“Take heed to yourselves.” It is ever our proud tendency to take heed to others, to guard others, and to correct others. The scriptures constantly teach us to take heed to, to guard, to discipline, and to correct ourselves.

“If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him.” If your brother or sister in Christ says, or does something by which he wrongs you, graciously, kindly speak to him about it, and no one else, make him aware of it, and no one else, always presuming that there was no intention on his part to hurt, injure, or offend
The word rebuke does not mean, “ream him out”, but show him what he has done. He may be shocked to discover it. In fact, the word carries with it the idea of showing honour. Yes, when I have been hurt, injured, or offended by my brother, it is my responsibility to show him honour.

“And if he repent, forgive him.” As soon as he says, “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. I would not intentionally hurt you for the world”, forgive him. Drop all anger, show him nothing but sweetness of temper, the kindness of love, the respect of one who has done no wrong; and do it immediately!

Perhaps you think, “Lord, that’s tough.” Oh, no. That is not tough. The next line is tough on our proud flesh!

“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.” Our brothers and sisters are just exactly like us. Like us, they do the same, dumb things over and over again (Proverbs 24:16).

Yet, nothing is more constantly urged in the New Testament than the practice of forgiveness. Why? Because there is nothing to which we are more naturally disinclined. Our flesh wants vengeance. Grace teaches forgiveness. Pride wants to punish. Mercy teaches forgiveness. Self-righteousness demands retribution. Love demands forgiveness. If I cannot forgive my brother the few trifling offences he may have committed against me, I know nothing experimentally of that free and full forgiveness that sinners have by the grace of God in Christ (Matthew 6:9-15; 18:35).

Our Lord warns, “Take heed to yourselves”, because nothing is so harmful to your soul, nothing makes you so miserable and useless as a proud, hard, unforgiving heart. Nothing makes a person more utterly wretched on the inside as nursing hurt feelings and feeding malice with the manure of resentment.

Our Lord’s word to us here is, “Do yourself no harm.” The
least degree of malice, hatred, or revenge is altogether contrary to the gospel we believe and totally inconsistent with the character of our blessed Lord.

But he knows what is in us. He remembers that we are dust, ever encumbered by our flesh. He knows how very prone we are to offend one another, how quick we are to hurt and injure each other, how repeatedly we say and do things to quench the Spirit, disrupt the peace, and injure the fellowship of his body.

Therefore, he tenderly teaches us how to correct the evil. When your brother does something against you, do not resent him for it, but pity him, pray for him. Call his name before your heavenly Father, his heavenly Father. If he aggravates his offence by frequent repetition, still, do not resent him, but pity him, pray for him, and do whatever you can to help him (Galatians 6:1-3). As often as he offends, that often forgive. If he repents, forgive him. If he does not repent, let that be his problem. Forgive him any way. William Mason wrote …

“We must not, at our peril, entertain anger, or let the sun go down on our wrath, but in our hearts freely and fully forgive an offending brother. But what if he remains stubborn and persists in a spirit of bitterness? Even then we are to forgive him in our hearts, and be desirous of embracing him in love.”

As God’s thoughts of love are toward us before we turn to him, so our thoughts of love should be to our offending brethren before they turn to us. Does the Son of God require us to forgive every repeated offence, even until seventy times seven, 490 times a day? I find something wonderfully glorious in that. Surely he will magnify his love and display his mercy in pardoning the innumerable offences of all who turn to him!

**Prayer For Faith**

Our Lord has been addressing his disciples in general. When the apostles, the preachers among them, heard his strong doctrine, this was their response: “And the apostles said unto the Lord,
Increase our faith.”

They understood that this was strong doctrine, far too strong for flesh to embrace. Flesh can grasp eternal justification, distinguishing grace, sovereign predestination, reprobation, and limited atonement. By comparison, those things are a piece of cake. Flesh can understand and promote the most rigidly orthodox dogma. Flesh loves and revels in church doctrine and the mysteries of prophecy.

But forgives requires a continual supply of grace, grace experienced deep in our souls, by which the Lord God continually increases our faith. And the more our faith in Christ increases, the more fully we learn that our only hope before God is free, constant, absolute forgiveness by the blood of the cross, flowing to our souls from the ever-springing fountain of his everlasting love, the more ready and able we will be to forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32-5:2).
“And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. 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. But which of you, having a servant ploughing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when 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? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 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” (Luke 17:5-10).

“Lord, Increase Our Faith”

Our Faith
The first thing we are confronted with in our text is our faith, not the greatness of it, but the smallness of it, not the strength of it, but the weakness of it, not the victory of it, but the failure of it. These days there is far too much emphasis placed upon our faith. Thank God, Christ, the Object of our faith is great; but our faith in Christ isn’t much to brag about. Is it? We all (all who truly trust Christ alone as Lord and Saviour) have great need to cry with the apostles, “Lord, Increase our faith.” The fact is we
all lack much in the matter of faith.

We are not told why the apostles made this request; but the reason is at least hinted at in the context. Remember, this request came after these men had attentively heard our Master give out the words of instruction contained in the last two chapters and in the first verses of chapter 17. I can imagine how their hearts must have sunk within them, as they heard these weighty lessons, one after another, fall from the Master’s lips. Perhaps they thought, “Who is sufficient for these things? Who can receive such high doctrines? Who can follow such lofty standards?” One thing is clear and plain. The request they made was deeply important, “Increase our faith.”

Faith in Christ is the root of the matter (Hebrews 11:6). “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” Until this question is settled, all others are meaningless. “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” That is the essential thing (John 3:36; 1 John 5:1, 10-12). Faith is the hand by which the soul lays hold on Christ, and is experimentally united to him, and saved by him. Faith in Christ is the secret of all spiritual comfort, assurance, and peace. According to a man’s faith will be his peace, his hope, his strength, his courage, his decisiveness, and his victory over the world.

Certainly, there are varying degrees of faith. Some have greater, stronger faith, and in others the exercise of faith is less and weaker. And it varies in us day by day, hour by hour, and moment by moment. There is “little” faith and “great” faith. There is “weak” faith and “strong” faith. Both are spoken of in the scriptures. Both are seen in the experience of God’s saints.

I ask again, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” It is written, “All men have not faith” (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Saving faith is not merely being able to recite a creed, or give assent to facts. Religion is not faith. Doctrinal orthodoxy is not faith. Baptism is not faith. Church membership is not faith. A religious experience is not faith. There are multitudes in hell who had all
these things; but they did not trust Christ.

Faith is the gift of God. It is wrought in us by the omnipotent operations of his grace (Ephesians 1:19, 20; 2:8; Colossians 2:12). This faith is the result of what the old preachers used to call Holy Spirit conviction (John 16:8-11). Faith in Christ is essential to salvation. You must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, or you must forever perish. Yet, faith is not our Saviour. Faith brings righteousness to us; but faith is not our righteousness. An imperfect faith cannot establish perfect righteousness. John Gill wrote …

“Faith is imperfect in the best of saints; our Lord frequently called his own disciples, men of little faith; and so conscious were they themselves of the imperfection of it, that they prayed to him, saying (Luke 17:5), Lord increase our faith. There are some deficiencies, something lacking, in the faith of the best of God’s people. Every one has reason to say, more or less, as the poor man in the gospel did (Mark 9:24), “Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief.” And for this reason faith cannot be our justifying righteousness, for that ought to be perfect. Besides, were it perfect, it is but a part of the law. It is indeed one of the weightier matters of the law, as in (Matthew 23:23), but then it is not the whole of the law. Now the scripture says (Galatians 3:10), “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” And God whose judgment is according to truth, cannot reckon that a perfect conformity to the law, which is only a partial one.”

Mustard Seed Faith
When the apostles prayed, “Lord, Increase our faith”, rather than assuring them that their faith was just fine, he seems to deliberately aggravate their sense of utter weakness and insufficiency in the matter of faith. “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” (v. 6).

Without question, this was a proverbial statement. It is not to be taken literally. Our Lord is using this proverbial statement to teach us a very, very important lesson. The reason we see so little of the glory of God, the reason we accomplish so little for the glory of God, the reason we constantly meet with things that appear to be insurmountable objects, the reason we are tossed about with so many fears, the reason we enjoy so little of our God is that we have such small, little, insignificant faith in our great God and Saviour, that it cannot even be compared to a grain of mustard seed faith (Mark 9:23; John 11:40).

“Lord, Increase our faith”! Perhaps nothing about us is more shameful than our lack of faith in such a great God and Saviour. Nothing about me needs more to be bathed in his precious blood, covered with his spotless righteousness, and forgiven by his constant grace than my faith in him! “Lord, Increase our faith”!

Faith And Forgiveness
Clearly, there is a connection between the disciples’ prayer in verse 5 and the Saviour’s instruction about forgiveness in verses 3 and 4. Read the three verses together.

“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. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.”

The Lord’s disciples were astonished at the infinite goodness the Lord Jesus had just expressed about the matter of forgiveness. Knowing that such faith is his gift, they begged his mercy to increase their faith. Longing to exercise the great grace of forgiveness to one another and knowing that they could never do so without his grace (John 15:5), they begged the Lord Jesus to increase their faith. Blessed are they who seek such grace,
that they may be gracious (Colossians 3:12, 13).

**Unprofitable Servants**

Not only is our faith in Christ so utterly weak that it can never merit anything from God, our best service to him is but the service and sacrifice of unprofitable servants (vv. 7-10).

“But which of you, having a servant ploughing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when 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? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 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.”

What a heavy blow our Lord gives to self-righteousness. We are all naturally proud and self-righteous. We think far more highly of ourselves, our deserts, and our character, than we ought.

Self-righteousness is a subtle disease that manifests itself in a thousand ways. We see it easily and quickly in others; but seldom see it in ourselves. Great pride often wears the cloak of humility. There is not a heart upon earth that does not contain a piece of the Pharisee’s character.

Yet, we must give up every claim of righteousness and merit before God, or we cannot be saved. If you would be saved, you must confess that there is no good thing in you, and that you have no merit, no goodness, and no worthiness of your own before God. You must renounce your own righteousness and trust the righteousness of another, even the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Once pardoned and forgiven, we must travel the daily journey of life under a deep conviction that we are but
“unprofitable servants”. At our best, we only do our duty, and have nothing to boast of. And even when we do our duty, it is not by our own power and might that we do it, but by the strength which is given to us from God our Saviour. Claim upon God we have none. Right to expect anything from God we have none. Worthiness to deserve anything from God we have none. All that we have we have received. All that we are we owe to God’s sovereign, distinguishing grace.

What is the root and cause of self-righteousness? How is it that such poor, weak, erring creatures as we are can ever dream of deserving anything at God’s hands? It all arises from ignorance. The eyes of our understandings are naturally blinded. We see neither ourselves, nor our lives, nor God, nor the law of God as we ought. Once the light of grace shines into a sinner’s heart the reign of self-righteousness is over. The pride remains and often raises its ugly head; but the reign of pride is broken when Christ comes to rule. The true believer does not trust himself, but Christ alone.

Lessons
The lessons set before us here are crystal clear. It is ever our responsibility to do our Master’s will, to obey his Word. When we have done all that he requires (even if that were possible and we did it), we should expect no reward for doing that which is our duty to do. We are the Lord’s, entirely his, lock, stock and barrel. All our time, strength, abilities, and possessions are his. We are obliged to love him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. When we have done all that he has commanded us, when our day of service in this world is finished, let us acknowledge, “We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” The words “unprofitable servants” mean “servants who have benefited their master nothing”, “servants of no value”, or “worthless servants of no benefit”.
A Great Contrast
That is exactly how all God’s people look upon themselves. We are “unprofitable servants”, “servants who have benefited our Master nothing”, “servants of no value”, “worthless servants of no benefit.” But our Master’s sees things another way. His view of us is a little different. Look at the contrast (Matthew 25:21, 34-40; 1 Peter 2:5). What a great and blessed revelation of the gospel this is: All who are born of God, all who trust the Lord Jesus are “accepted in the Beloved”, and our works too!
Chapter 18

“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: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. 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. 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 this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole” (Luke 17:11-19).

Cleansed, But Not Healed

Have you just been cleansed, or have you been healed? Have you merely been changed, or have you been made whole? During the days of our Lord’s earthly ministry, there were many who enjoyed the outward, temporal benefits of his works who never knew him. Many who touched his body never touched him. Many who drank the wine at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee never tasted the wine of his grace. Many ate the loaves and fishes who never tasted the Bread of Life. And there were multitudes who knew the power of his word to heal their
bodies who never knew the power of his grace in the healing of their souls. Luke 17:11-19 demonstrates these things very clearly.

How many there are like those nine lepers who want no more from Christ than power to correct their woes. Because that is all they seek, that is all they get. I have known many who in times of great danger, or great difficulty, or because they have brought upon themselves great misery; pray, profess faith in Christ, join the church, and become very religious (at least for a while). Their lives have been radically reformed. They have made great changes. Their troubles were healed. And once they got what they wanted, like the nine lepers in this passage, they “are not found”. They were cleansed, but only outwardly. They were cleansed, but not healed. There is a difference.

Then there are others like the one leper who “when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at Christ’s feet, giving him thanks.” There are many, many lessons for our souls in this passage. May God the Holy Spirit be our Teacher and seal to our hearts the things revealed in these ten lepers.

A Blessed Appointment

“And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.” The Lord Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. He was going there for the blessed purpose of laying down his life in the room and stead of his sinful people, to finish the work for which he had come into this world of sin and woe. There he would lay down his life for his sheep. There he would pour out his life’s blood unto death, bearing our sin in his own body on the cursed tree. There, he would suffer all the horrid wrath of God as our Substitute, all the unmitigated fury of divine justice to the full satisfaction of justice, until at last he would cry, “It is finished”! He was going to Jerusalem to put away sin by the sacrifice of
himself.

As he made his way to the place of sacrifice, “he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.” Much speculation has been made about this; but the simple fact is that the nearest way to get from Galilee to Jerusalem was by going through Samaria. And our ever faithful Saviour had an appointment at Jerusalem that he must now keep, an appointment with God’s offended justice, an appointment of grace and redemption for us, and an appointment of death for him. His time had now come. His hour was now at hand. And the Lord Jesus would not turn back (Isaiah 50:5-7). “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved us to the end”!

**Ten Needy Lepers**

“And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off.” We are told in verse 16 that one of these lepers was a Samaritan. I find that interesting. The Samaritans and Jews despised one another. Normally, they would never be seen in company with one another. But affliction and misery, poverty and need often make men friends who in times of health and prosperity despise one another because of stupid prejudice. If misery will cause lost men to put aside such proud strife and division, how shameful it is when those who profess to know the grace of God cannot put away social, racial, and class distinctions!

On the outskirts of one of the villages, ten leprous men were gathered to meet the Son of God, united in a community of deadly misery. They were far off, because they dare not approach, since their approach was pollution; and they were obliged to warn away all who would come near them by the shameful, heart-rending cry, “Unclean! Unclean”!

No doubt these ten lepers had heard that the Lord Jesus was passing their way. Why else would they have come to meet Him? They had heard his fame, how that he had healed other
lepers. So they came to the Son of God desiring that he might heal them.

These men were lepers. There was something in that living death of leprosy, recalling as it did the most frightful images of suffering and degradation; corrupting as it did the very fountains of the life blood of man; distorting his appearance, making his touch loathsome, slowly incrusting and infecting him with a plague far more horrible than death itself, something, I say, which always seems to have aroused our Lord’s heart with keen and instantaneous compassion.

Leprosy
I doubt that anyone who has never seen a man in the condition of these men can imagine the scene before our Lord. Here are ten men who are lepers. Their voices are hoarse and raspy. They are covered with sores and scabs. Their faces like chunks of burned coal are bloated, but hard, cracked, and scabbed. Their flesh is rotting on their bodies. Their eyes are bloodshot and burning, their noses sunken because of decaying cartilage, their tongues black, swollen, and ulcerated. They are dying a miserable death together!

Our Leprosy
Transfer the picture in your mind to another. You are looking now into a mirror. Oh, what miserable, deplorable objects we are. You see, you and I are all lepers by nature. Leprosy stands before us in holy scripture as a vivid picture of sin. Leprosy was, according to Old Testament law, a disease that made a person unclean. He was pronounced unclean by the priest (the law), put out of the camp of Israel, and isolated from society. Everything the leper touched was defiled and unclean. Leprosy, like sin, is a spreading disease, corrupting the whole life of a man, until he is destroyed by it altogether. The leprosy of sin corrupts the entire human race. It is spread through all our members. It has shut us
outside the camp and made us far off from God (Ephesians 2:11, 12). Leprosy, like sin, is an incurable disease, incurable by any earthly, human means.

Lepers were never sent to a doctor. They were sent to a priest. But all the priest could do was look at the leper’s condition, declare him unclean, and shut him out of the camp. He could do nothing for him (Leviticus 13:2, 3; 14:2, 3). The whole Levitical law concerning lepers and leprosy is intended to show us the nature and use of the law. It identifies our leprosy, concludes that we are lepers, and declares that we are unclean, but does nothing to change or help our condition. Nothing but the precious, sin-atoning blood of Christ, nothing but the stripes inflicted by the whip of God’s holy law and justice can heal us of our disease and cleanse us of the plague of our hearts.

**Cleansing**

As leprosy portrays our sin, the cleansing of a leper under the law (Leviticus 13 and 14) portrayed the healing of our souls by Christ. In order for the leper to be ceremonially clean, two birds were to be taken, clean and alive (Leviticus 14:5, 6, 50-52). Both were typical of Christ.

One of the birds was killed in an earthen vessel over running water, showing that Christ must be killed, his blood must be shed for the cleansing of leprous sinners. The earthen vessel denoted his human nature, his flesh, in which he was put to death. The running water signified the purifying nature of his blood, and the continued virtue of it to cleanse from all sin.

The living bird, along with cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop was dipped in the blood of the slain bird. Then, the priest let the living bird go, typifying the resurrection of Christ and our resurrection with him, declaring redemption accomplished, acceptance assured, and sin put away.
Cry For Mercy
Ten men who were lepers met the Lord Jesus on his way to Calvary. “And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” These men knew full well that no mere man had ever healed another of leprosy. But they had heard that this Man had. So they called upon him, the Man who stood before them in human flesh as God, asking him to have mercy upon them. Our blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, is Jehovah-Rophe, the Lord who heals us.

You Are Clean
“And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.” When these lepers begged him to show them mercy, the Lord Jesus said, “Go show yourselves unto the priests.” In the Old Testament law those who thought they might be lepers were required to go show themselves to the priests, so that the priests (the Levites, the law) could confirm that they were indeed lepers (Leviticus 13:2, 3). Obviously, these men had already been through that procedure. They were already declared to be and identified as lepers.

Why, then, did the Lord Jesus command them to go show themselves to the priests again. You will find the answer in Leviticus 14:2, 3. There the leper who was clean was required to go show himself to the priest, not to be made clean, but to be pronounced clean. In other words, the Lord Jesus said, “You are clean”, and sent them on their way to be ceremonially pronounced clean. These men believed his word. They headed straight to the priests to be pronounced clean.

“And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.” As they started to the priests, they looked upon themselves and realized that they were clean. Their leprosy was gone. They had been healed by the mere sovereign will of the sovereign Saviour!
One Who Turns Back

“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. 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 this stranger.”

These verses are full of instruction. Why did the other nine go on to the priests? And why did this one Samaritan stranger return to the Lord Jesus, glorifying God with a loud voice, as he fell down on his face at the Saviour’s feet? The answer should be obvious.

The other nine called the Lord Jesus by his name, Jehovah-Jesus, God our Saviour, and acknowledged him as Master, and were cleansed of their leprosy in their bodies; but this man, being both cleansed of his physical leprosy and healed of the leprosy that plagued his heart, came back to worship the Lord Jesus as God his Saviour. He was not only cleansed of his leprosy, he was made whole.

Made Whole

“And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.” When the nine were cured of the ailment of their bodies, they had obtained all that they wanted. They needed and wanted nothing else. But this Samaritan stranger had experienced something else. He was healed of his leprosy, and grace was poured into his soul. The nine were content to go on just as they had before, living under the yoke of bondage and ceremonialism. But this man was forever done with Jewish priests, religious ceremonies, legal sacrifices, and carnal ordinances. He fled away to the Son of God, the Author and Finisher of his salvation.

Countless multitudes, like those nine lepers, being healed
only outwardly in their bodies, by a religious encounter of one kind or another, never know or worship the Son of God. But poor, wretched sinners, knowing the leprosy of their souls, as soon as they are made whole by the Lord Jesus, fall at his feet, glorifying God with thankful hearts. They go no more to the law of carnal commandments, but ever come to the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, made our Priest forever after the power of an endless life (Hebrews 7:16).

To all who thus believe on the Son of God, he declares, “Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.” Did the Lord Jesus actually say that? Surely not! Oh, but he did, didn’t He? He did not just say it here; he said it many times. In Matthew 9:22 he said to the woman with an issue of blood who touched him, “Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole.” In Mark 10:52 he told Bartimaeus, whom he had just healed of his blindness, “Thy faith hath made thee whole.” In Luke 7:50 our Saviour said to the woman who was a sinner, who worshipped him as her Saviour, “Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.” In Luke 18:42 the Master gave sight to another blind man and said, “Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.”

I know many who would cringe if they heard a preacher say that to any sinner. They are scared to death that the plain statements of holy scripture will utterly destroy their wonderful system of doctrine. Any system of doctrine that cannot bear the plain statements of holy scripture is a corrupt system and needs destroying.

Such statements as this, “Thy faith hath made thee whole”, must never be explained away, but delightfully embraced. No, faith is not our Saviour! We are saved altogether by the work of God’s omnipotent grace, without our aid. But there is no salvation without faith in Christ!

Yes, Christ gives us faith. It is the gift and operation of God the Holy Spirit. But having wrought faith in us and given it to
us, it is our faith. And we receive all the bounteous blessings of God’s rich, free grace by faith in Christ.

The Lord God promises eternal salvation to faith in his dear Son, declaring that all who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ have everlasting life. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” And every sinner who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ glorifies God, falling at the feet of his all-glorious Saviour, worshipping him alone as his Saviour, with a heart of never dying, deeply felt gratitude, crying, “By the grace of God I am what I am! Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift”!

I ask you again: have you just been cleansed, or have you been healed? Have you merely been changed, or have you been made whole? May the Lord Jesus now make you whole for his own dear name’s sake.
Chapter 19

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, 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. 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. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation” (Luke 17:20-25).

The Kingdom Of God

Almost everything you hear preachers say or read from the writings of men about the kingdom of God is totally false. All the popular books about the coming of the Kingdom of God and the end of the world promote nothing but carnal notions about future things. Almost everything to be found in the notes of reference Bibles and study Bibles about prophetic things is false. Obviously, I have not read them all; but I have read a few, and I have not yet read even one that sets forth the teaching of holy scripture about the kingdom of God. I urge you to ignore such
religious tomfoolery. And if what I have to say to you in this study is not verified by the Word of God, count what I say as nothing more than religious tomfoolery. I will go further than that. If what I have to say to you in this message is not exactly what God says in his Word about his Kingdom, ignore me and count what I say as nothing more than religious tomfoolery.

Let us look at these six verses line by line, praying that God the Holy Spirit will be our Teacher.

**A Derisive Demand**

First, we read that our Lord Jesus was “demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come” (v. 20). Everything the Pharisees asked our Lord was asked with an evil motive. They never asked anything that they might learn, but only that they might accuse the Lord Jesus of some evil by twisting his words, or deride our Saviour’s doctrine.

But here, they went even further; they “demanded” him! What arrogance! What presumption! What hellishness of heart is exposed when sinful men dare to demand anything from the God of Glory! Yet, those who made this demand pretended to be the only true worshippers of God!

The word translated “demanded” means “accosted” or “interrogated”. All the Jews, including the Pharisees, were looking for the coming of the Kingdom of God. They were looking for the promised Messiah to come and establish his Kingdom on earth, making them the rulers over all the world.

But this demand has the tone of derision in it. It is as if they said, “You tell us you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the King. If that is true, where is the kingdom? Do you really expect anyone to believe that such a poor, common man, a man known

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7 If a man is getting rich on his message, you can be sure it is his message, not God’s!
to keep company with sinners is the Christ of God? How long
do you expect us to wait for this kingdom of yours to appear?”

The Master’s Answer
Our Lord Jesus seized the occasion given him by their derision
to teach his own disciples some blessed gospel truths.

First, he says, “The Kingdom of God cometh not with
observation” (v. 20). I can almost picture the puzzled look of
utter disbelief upon the faces of those ignorant Pharisees. Our
Lord answered these fools according to their folly, only to make
them more ignorant, only to give them greater confusion.

Yet, he was at the same time teaching his own disciples who
were in the crowd that day, and teaching his disciples of all
future days. How Peter, James, and John must have perked up
their ears. Mary Magdalene, I am sure, came to a dead silence.
“The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation.” What does
that mean? It means that the Kingdom of God is not at all like
any earthly kingdom.

Its coming cannot be observed by the eye, by observing
signs, marking dates, measuring time, or checking off fulfilled
prophecy. Its presence cannot be observed by carnal means,
because it is not carnal, but spiritual. Those who expect to
observe anything of this kind are sure to be disappointed. They
wait and watch in vain for a carnal, material kingdom that will
never come, just as the Pharisees did. The Lord Jesus says, “The
Kingdom of God cometh not with observation.” These three
things, at least, are meant by his words.

The kingdom of God does not come with pomp and
pageantry. It does not come with an outward show of any kind.
In fact, the translation given in the margin of your Bible is, “The
Kingdom of God cometh not with outward show.”

The kingdom of God does not come in such a way that men
can observe it. God’s Kingdom is a kingdom no one can see,
except he be born again. It is a kingdom none can enter, but by
the new birth (John 3:3, 5). No one can discern anything at all about this Kingdom, except those who are taught of God and have the mind of Christ (John 3:1-8; 1 Corinthians 2:12-16).

Our Lord’s words in verse 20 also mean, perhaps primarily so that the Kingdom of God does not come by the observation of religious laws, ceremonies, traditions, and ordinances.

The kingdom of God does not come by observing holy days and doing holy things. You do not get into the Kingdom of God by receiving imaginary sacraments and doing imaginary good works. The kingdom of God is not a matter of religious rites and taboos (Romans 14:17; Colossians 2:20-23). The fact is if you and I see something that so greatly impresses our eyes, our natural senses, and/or our feelings that we are by what we see inclined to think, “Surely, the Kingdom of God is here”, we are wrong, dead wrong. Look at the first line of verse 21 and see if that is not precisely what the Master tells us.

A Warning

“Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there” (v. 21). What does that mean? Really, it is just an amplification of what our Lord has just declared, “The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation.” Many in those days, in the days immediately following our Lord’s earthly ministry, and at various times throughout the past 2000 years have said that this or the other false prophet is the Christ. Many have said the Kingdom of God will appear here or there, at this or that time.

Our Lord warns us to ignore such claims, no matter who makes them, no matter how convincing their arguments, no matter how many follow them.

But there is more to the warning than that. We live in a day of mega-churches, super-churches, and crystal cathedrals. Every year at Christmas and Easter every major television network broadcasts the idolatrous splendour of Rome and his “ unholiness” the pope. Televangelists bedazzle millions with
their religious crusades, great works, and miracles. And we are all prone to marvel at the great whore Babylon, and the riches, crowds, and magnificence of free-will, works religion. We tend to think, “Surely, this must be God’s work and God’s Kingdom. All these people cannot be wrong.”

That is exactly what the Apostle John did when he saw it (Revelation 17:4-8). But such marvelling is but marvelling at a gorgeously arrayed harlot, whose sole mission is the everlasting destruction of immortal souls, a harlot who deserves to be and shall be destroyed. Babylon religion is so potent to natural sense that all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life are intoxicated by the wine of her fornications.

**Within You**

Now, watch the Lord’s next words in the latter part of verse 21. “Behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” The word “within” might be translated, as it is in the margin of your Bible, “among”. In that case our Lord’s words here mean that the Kingdom of God is already here, in your midst. He and his disciples were among them. That is certainly true, the Kingdom of God is already in the earth. God’s Church is his Kingdom. Yet, the word used by our translators conveys our Lord’s doctrine accurately. “Behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”

It is a spiritual kingdom not a carnal kingdom, a heavenly kingdom not an earthly kingdom, an inward kingdom not an outward kingdom. It lies not in outward things, “but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17). The Kingdom of God is established in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners by the omnipotent grace of King Jesus. It is established by the binding and dispossession of Satan, the strong man armed, and the overthrow of the old man, sin, with its deceitful lusts, from the throne. The Kingdom of God has its seat in the inward parts, the inner man. It does not
lie in words, in an outward profession of religion. It is oil in the vessel of the heart, and is distinct from the lamp of a visible profession. It does not lie in external works and duties; but it is an inward principle of godliness in the soul, or spirit of man, produced there by the Spirit of God. The kingdom of God is a kingdom governed by grace. In this kingdom grace reigns through righteousness, unto eternal life by Jesus Christ the King. Christ Jesus, as the King of saints, dwells and reigns in his people.

**Great Trouble**

In verses 22 and 23 our Lord turns to his disciples. He warns us here of a time of great trouble. The time he is talking about is not any specific day, but any day in which the words of these two verses are applicable.

“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” (v. 22). The “days” to which our Lord refers are the whole gospel age, the days of God’s church in this world, from the time of our Saviour’s death to the time of his second coming.

How often those disciples who heard these words must have echoed them! How often they must have pined for Christ’s physical presence with them again! How often they must have thought to themselves, “How I wish I had paid more attention! How I wish I had not neglected the opportunities I had! What sweet hours and days of blessed communion and instruction they were”!

But, I am confident that our Lord’s words here were not spoken for those disciples alone. They were spoken for us. They are applicable to us. “The days of the Son of man” are those times and seasons when the Son of man meets with, instructs, comforts, and blesses his people, by making himself known to us, by taking the things of God and showing them to us. They
are our days of public worship in the house of God under the ministry of the gospel. It is here where the Lord Jesus promises that he will meet with his people (Matthew 18:20).

When God’s saints are deprived of these days, by reason of persecution, or sickness, or providence, then they learn to value them highly. Once they are gone, they are treasured. Let us, as John Gill admonished, “prize, make use of, and improve such days and opportunities, whilst we have them. We know not how soon our teachers may be removed into corners, when we shall wish in vain for them; and seasons of hearing them, as is here suggested. Sad it is to know the worth of gospel opportunities, by the want of them”!

Yet, even when such times come, even when we are placed in circumstances in which we have no place of worship, no one to preach the gospel to us, no sweet times of fellowship in God’s house with Zion’s pilgrims, should such ever come to pass, we must not chase after the bubbles of religious excitement. We must not follow those who follow false christs (v. 23).

His Day
In verse 24 our Saviour speaks of his day and of his coming in his day without warning, without signs, suddenly and speedily, like a bolt of lightning. “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.”

Certainly, this is applicable to our Lord’s glorious, second advent. But the opening word of the verse, “for”, seems to me to give it a direct connection to our Lord’s words in verse 22, “ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man”, and our Lord’s warning not to follow false christs in verses 22 and 23. You see, the days of the Son of man are those days in which our Saviour comes to us in mercy, love, and grace, and makes himself known to us. Whatever that day is, it is his day, the day of the Lord, and it always comes unexpectedly, like a bolt of
lightning (Isaiah 12:1-6). Oh, what a day that day is! When Christ comes to save his own by power of his grace, when he comes to revive his languishing ones, when he comes to call his ransomed at their appointed hour of death, when he comes in his glorious second advent, whenever Christ comes to his own, it is his day; and it is glorious!

The “Must”
But, before our Saviour can come to any sinner in saving mercy, before he could ascend to his throne in Glory as our Mediator, before he could come again without sin unto salvation, something else must happen. He must suffer and die as our sin-atoning Substitute, by the hands of wicked men, according to the purpose of God, for the satisfaction of Divine justice, that the Lord our God might be “a just God and a Saviour” (v. 25; Isaiah 45:20; Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; 9:12; Luke 9:22; 22:7; 24:7, 44; John 3:14; 12:32).

Before he could come to us in grace, with the blessings of redemption, grace, and salvation, the Lord Jesus had to suffer and die as our Substitute, put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself, rise from the dead, and ascend to his throne as the King of Glory, as our Saviour King. Thank God, he did!
Chapter 20

“And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, 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. 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. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. 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. 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. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. 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. 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” (Luke 17:20-37).

The Distinguishing Grace Of God

The Lord Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to lay down is life for us, to die as our Substitute, “the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.” This passage in Luke (vv. 20-37) is thought by many to be an abbreviated version of our Lord’s Olivet Discourse given in Matthew’s Gospel (Matthew 24 and 25), because there are portions used in it that are exactly the same. But that is a mistake. Though some of the words used by the Master are the same, the occasion is different. In Matthew 24 our Lord Jesus had already come to Jerusalem. Here he is on his way to Jerusalem, passing through the regions of Samaria and Galilee (v. 11). In Matthew 24 and 25 our Lord is answering questions raised by his disciples concerning the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem and the time of his coming. Here, his message begins as a response to the Pharisees who accosted him as to “when the kingdom of God should come” (v. 20).

Our Saviour answered these Pharisees by telling them that their notions concerning the kingdom of God were carnal and altogether wrong. He told them that the kingdom of God does not come with observation. These three things, at least, are meant by his words:

The kingdom of God does not come with pomp and pageantry. It does not come with an outward show of any kind. In fact, the translation given in the margin of your Bible is, “The kingdom of God cometh not with outward show.” The kingdom of God does not come in such a way that men can observe it.
God’s kingdom is a kingdom no one can see, except those who are born again. It is a kingdom none can enter, but by the new birth (John 3:3, 5).

Our Lord’s words in verse 20 also mean, perhaps primarily mean that the kingdom of God does not come by the observation of religious laws, ceremonies, traditions, and ordinances.

### A Warning

“Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there”! (v. 21). That is just an amplification of what our Lord has just declared: “The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.” Many in those days, in the days immediately following our Lord’s earthly ministry, and at various times throughout the past 2000 years have said that this or the other false prophet is the Christ. Many have said the kingdom of God will appear here or there, at this or that time. Our Lord warns us to ignore such claims, no matter who makes them, no matter how convincing their arguments are, and no matter how many people follow them.

### Within You

“Behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” It is a spiritual kingdom not a carnal kingdom, a heavenly kingdom not an earthly kingdom, an inward kingdom not an outward kingdom. It lies not in outward things, but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Romans 14:17). The kingdom of God is established in the hearts of chosen, redeemed sinners when Christ the King of Glory enters into the heart and establishes his dominion in them by his omnipotent grace.

### Great Trouble

In verses 22-25 our Lord turns to his disciples. He is now talking specifically to his own and warns us here of a time of great trouble. The time he is talking about is not any specific day, but any day in which the words of these verses are applicable.
“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. 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. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.”

The warning continues in verse 26. “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.” Notice that our Saviour specifically says, “in the days (not day) of the Son of man.” He is talking about any day when he appears to make himself known: his first advent, his second advent, or his day of grace when he comes to save chosen sinners.

While most are convinced that the verses before us are talking about our Lord’s coming in judgment at the last day, I am convinced otherwise. In this passage our Saviour is talking to his disciples about God’s great distinguishing grace. Everything in life decidedly illustrates and confirms his doctrine (Matthew 11:25, 26).

The State Of Man
In verses 26-30 our Lord teaches us a lesson about the state of man in this world, a lesson about fallen humanity that we tend to forget. The lesson is this: man never changes. We all tend to think that the present generation is the worst that has ever lived. Do not misunderstand me. I do not in any way minimize or excuse the horrid ungodliness of this generation. But, in these verses our Lord Jesus tells us plainly that the state of man upon the earth today is exactly as it was in the days of Noah and in the days of Lot. The human race is not getting better, and, really, it is not getting worse. It is just bigger and less capable of hiding the things it would like to hide.
In the days of Noah, before God finally destroyed the whole race, except for Noah and his family, in the flood of his wrath, the whole human race lived to gratify their own lusts, and nothing more. The same was true in the days of Lot. The same thing is true today. And that is the way things will continue, until Christ comes again to gather his elect unto glory in complete salvation and to destroy the rest of the world in the execution of his just wrath.

What is the state and condition of this world? What is the state and condition of mankind? Let me make the question more personal. What is your state and condition before God right now? If you are without Christ, turn to the book of Genesis, and see. Read what God says, and tremble. Tremble, because this is the state you are in. You are ripe for and incessantly asking for the wrath of God.

Our Lord’s comparison between the days preceding his own coming and the days of Noah and Lot throws us back to the book of Genesis, chapters 6, 18, and 19. In those days, as in ours, ungodliness, corruption, lust, vanity, pleasure, engrossment with the business of life in this world so utterly consumed the hearts of men, that there was no room for God, either in man’s thoughts or his world (Genesis 6:2, 5). Men and women lived, but lived as they pleased, gratifying their own lusts in this world. They had no other concern than food and drink, family and home, business and pleasure.

The same was true in Sodom (Genesis 18:21). When the Lord God looked upon that city, he saw one righteous man there who “vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds” (2 Peter 2:8).

I cannot help noticing that our Lord makes no mention of the horrid perversity of homosexuality practised in Sodom in either Matthew or in Luke as he describes the wickedness of Lot’s generation. Why? The omission is certainly not intended to imply that there is nothing in that reprobate behaviour, so
common and so promoted in our day, to make rational men shudder and cringe with anger. That immoral conduct is ever the result of self-willed idolatry, the ruin of social order and decency, and the result of divine judgment upon men.

So why didn’t the Saviour mention the one horrid sin for which Sodom is known throughout the world? The reason is obvious: he would have all to understand that all who live unto themselves, for themselves, with no regard for God, his Son, his gospel and eternity, are like those reprobate, filthy Sodomites, “children of wrath”, abiding under the wrath of God, courting eternal damnation.

The just and righteous sentence of God upon Noah’s generation and upon Sodom was announced, and men were urged to repent by God’s servants; but they continued in their hellish rebellion, living in the lust of their own hearts until Noah entered into the ark and the Lord God rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom (Genesis 6:3, 7, 13; 19:11-14). Yet, even in those evil days, the Lord God had an elect remnant he was determined to save, and he would not destroy the world until Noah was safe in the ark, or Sodom until Lot was safe in Zoar.

“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” (1 Peter 3:20). So it is now. And so it shall be until the end of time. God’s determination to save his elect makes him longsuffering toward them, because he is not willing that any should perish, but that every loved, chosen, redeemed sinner be saved. And his longsuffering is the salvation of his people (2 Peter 3:9, 15; Genesis 19:17-22). As in the days of Noah and Lot, God’s sovereign, distinguishing grace was both manifest and effectual, so it is now and so it shall be until time shall be no more. “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” And Christ, the Angel of the Lord, brought Lot out of Sodom, “the Lord being merciful unto him”!

Read verse 30 and rejoice! “Even thus shall it be in the day
when the Son of man is revealed.” Oh, clap your hands and sing praise! “The foundation of God standeth sure. The Lord knoweth them that are his.” He knows how to deliver his own; and he will!

**God’s Distinguishing Grace**

In verses 30-36 the Lord Jesus displays the distinguishing grace of our God, calling us to continually consecrate ourselves to him. As in Noah’s day and in Lot’s day, so it is today. None will repent and believe, until the Lord God Almighty, by an act of omnipotent grace, brings them into the Ark Christ Jesus, and mercifully forces them to flee for their lives from Sodom, finding refuge in Zoar. But, blessed be his name forever, some shall be shut up in the Ark. Some shall flee to Christ. God will see to it. “Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.”

The Lord God has mercy on whom he will have mercy. He saved Abel and passed by Cain. He saved Noah and his family and passed by the world. He chose Abraham and passed by all the rest of the inhabitants of Ur. He saved Lot and passed by his wife, his sons-in-law, and his other daughters, along with all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. He loved Jacob and hated Esau. He takes one as it pleases him, and passes by another as it pleases him.

**An Undivided Heart**

Here is a third lesson plainly taught in our text: the Lord Jesus Christ demands consecration to himself. He demands an undivided heart (vv. 31-33).

“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. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.”
What a solemn warning our Lord here gives us about divided allegiance. He says to all who profess to be his disciples, “Remember Lot’s wife.” Remember, she left Sodom with her husband, Lot. Remember, she was married to a righteous man. Remember, she worshipped God with Abraham. Remember, she wilfully disobeyed God’s explicit command. She looked back! Why did she look back? She had a divided heart. She left Sodom with Lot, but she left her heart in Sodom. Remember, she perished with the Sodomites, though she was standing in the presence and company of three angels and her righteous husband. God struck her dead in an instant! Remember this, too: as it was in that day, so it is today, and so it shall be until the end of days. There are many who make a profession of faith because they fear the wrath of God, who live with their hearts in Sodom, many who hope to go to heaven with a divided heart. It shall not happen. “Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.”

Eagles And The Carcass
“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” (v. 37). The disciples failed to understand what the Lord was saying, as they often did and we often do. They wanted to know where this manifestation and division would take place, looking upon our Lord’s words as a prediction of something that was to take place at a specific time and in a specific place.

What is the meaning of our Lord’s answer? Modern translations have not helped, but only compounded the confusion. Most translate the word “body” as “carcass” and the word “eagles” as “vultures”. In both cases such translations are wrong. Our translation is exactly as it should be. “He said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.” The word “body” means the body of one
who has been slain. Notice the definite article. Our Lord said, “Wheresoever the body is (not wheresoever bodies are), thither will the eagles be gathered together.” Also, notice that he speaks of eagles (not buzzards) in the plural.

Remember the context. Our Lord is talking to us about the distinguishing grace of God. He is talking about faith in himself. The body of the One slain is our Lord Jesus Christ. “The eagles” are God’s elect who are gathered to him in faith. Let’s see if the Book of God teaches this.

God’s elect are spoken of in the scriptures as eagles (Deuteronomy 32:8-12; Job 9:25, 26; Isaiah 41:31; Revelation 12:14). Our Lord’s answer to his disciples’ question, “Where, Lord?” is this: “Wherever Christ crucified is set forth in the preaching of the gospel, wherever the crucified Christ is revealed to men by the power and grace of his Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, there will his elect be gathered unto him ‘in the day when the Son of man is revealed.’”

Christ’s eagles “gather” to him who is their food. He is the One upon whom we live. He is to us life eternal. The body of our slain Saviour, Christ crucified, is the meeting-point of his elect. He is the great magnet drawing needy souls like eagles to the carcass. He said, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”

God our Creator in the Book of Job says of the eagle, his creature, “she abideth upon the rock from whence she seeketh the prey; her eyes behold afar off … where the slain are, there is she.” God our Saviour adds his application: As the eagles gather round the corpse, so the souls of men chosen, redeemed, and called by My grace are gathered unto Me.

Keen and swift as eagles for the prey, so are God’s elect for Christ crucified. These are the words of our blessed Saviour. Let not one of them fall to the ground. “Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.”

The eagle is a bird of prey. In all birds of prey there is great,
vast quickness of scent to smell their proper food, even from a great distance. Added to its sense of smell, the eagle has a ravenous appetite. Compelled by hunger and its sense of smell, it flies quickly, at every opportunity, to its feast.

But the eagle is not a vulture. It does not feed on dead things, but living. And the crucified Christ, upon whom our souls feed, though once slain as our Substitute, is alive for evermore!

If Christ has given us life in himself, if he has made us alive by his grace, he gives us a continually increasing appetite and hunger for himself. Does he not? Do you not hunger for him, for his grace, for his embrace, for his righteousness, for his blood, for his presence? Hungering for him, his eagles fly to the place where he is, as famished birds hastening to the prey: his house, his Word, his ordinances, his throne of grace. “If”, Robert Hawker observed, “Jesus be indeed the one blessed object of thy desire, will not this be manifested by the earnestness of thy desires?”

As David longed for the waters of Bethlehem when he was thirsty, O let my soul long for Christ. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks”, so he longed for his God. May the same be true of you and me. Oh for grace to have my soul hungering for Christ crucified day and night! As the eagles gather together unto the prey, so should we be found feasting upon Christ crucified relentlessly. In him, in his glorious excellencies is everything our souls need. His name is our salvation and our high tower. His blood is our atonement. His righteousness is our dress. His perfections are our delight. His promises are our meditation. His grace is our assurance. His visits are our sweet memories. His presence is our joy. His strength is our comfort. His glory is our ambition. His coming is our hope. His company forever is our heaven!

Wherever Christ is, there will his people fly, as eagles to the prey and as doves to their windows (Isaiah 40:8).
Chapter 21

“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: 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. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:1-8).

The Parable Of The Unjust Judge

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God is our Saviour. We live by the merit of his imputed righteousness, the efficacy of his sin-atoning blood, and the power of his omnipotent grace. And our great Saviour was and is in all things our example. Let none imagine that his life was nothing more than an example. Yet, we must never fail to see that he is the example by which we must seek to pattern our lives (1 Peter 2:21-24).

He says, “I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done” (John 13:15). He shows us by example how to love God and one another. He shows us by example how to suffer
patiently, committing ourselves unto our God. He shows us by example how to live in this world by faith, believing God and serving him. In all things, Christ himself is the pattern we are to follow.

As in all other things, our blessed Saviour was supremely exemplary in prayer. When he exhorts us to continue in prayer and to “pray without ceasing”, he is only telling us to do as he has done. If ever there was a man who might have no need to engage in prayer, it would have been the God-man. He was never defiled with the sins that constantly beset us. He had no lusts of the flesh warring in his members. He is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He knew no sin, did no sin, and had no sin. He walked with God perfectly, in complete obedience to the Father’s will, ever doing those things that please him, always glorifying him in thought, in word, and in deed. Add to that the fact that this man, the God-man, had (even while he walked on the earth) in his possession all omnipotence as God, and you cannot help being astonished that he is the supreme example of faith and prayer.

Prayer
Luke tells us, as he introduces the parable of the unjust judge, that the lesson, the message of the parable is just this: “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint”! As one of the old writers put it, “He hangs the key at the door.” So the first thing we see in this parable is this word of instruction about prayer. “Men ought always to pray and not to faint.”

The subject of prayer is one that always arouses my interest, though it always causes me to blush with shame. I fear I know very little about it. Prayer is the life breath of the believing heart. J. C. Ryle was exactly right when he wrote, “Here it is that religion begins. Here it flourishes. Here it decays. Prayer is one of the first evidences of conversion (Acts 9:11). Neglect of prayer is the sure road to a fall (Matthew 26:40, 41).” Our
Saviour says, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.”

In this parable the Lord Jesus instructs us in the matter of prayer by telling a story. It is a story about a poor, needy widow, who obtained justice from a wicked judge simply because she would not leave him alone until she got what she needed from him. She would not leave him alone, because she was in a pinch. She had to have what he alone could give her. She would not leave him alone, because she had no one else to whom she could turn for help. She got what she needed by the sheer force of her importunity. The judge said, “Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her (I will see that she gets justice), lest by her continual coming she weary me.”

The Saviour tells us the meaning of this in verses 6-8. “And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.” He says, “The day is soon to come when the Lord God will avenge his chosen. He will do that which is right and just for them and with them. He will satisfy all their needs, all the cravings of their souls, for which they continually cry unto him day and night. He will not put them off forever. He will avenge them speedily.”

If the constant, importunate cries of this widow stirred up the heartless judge to avenge her of her adversary, how much more shall the cries of our hearts to our God stir up our heavenly Father, the Judge of all the earth who must do right, to avenge us of our adversary the devil!

Pray Always?
But is it possible for us to pray always? There are some who take these words very literally and vainly imagine that they are praying as they try to constantly repeat the words of scripted
prayers, usually rubbing their magical prayer beads as they do. That is the whole notion behind monastic and cloistral religion. Needless to say, that is not what our Lord is teaching here. Such religious insanity, self-righteousness, and idolatry is not prayer.

Our Lord’s words here, “Men ought always to pray”, simply mean that we ought always to live looking to our God in faith, constantly carrying our needs and our hearts desires to him. Our Master gives us similar instructions in other places (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Colossians 4:2; Hebrews 4:16).

We are to “continue in prayer”. That is the sense of our Lord’s doctrine in Luke 18. He does not tell us to pray all the time. That would be impossible. He is telling us to live in the spirit and attitude of prayer and fellowship with God. Again, I am not suggesting that we neglect the act of prayer, or fail to spend time alone with God in prayer. Not at all. Let us pray more and pray frequently about all things.

“Watch in the same.” Let us ever be watchful over our souls and watchful for one another in prayer, ever looking to our God for mercy and grace. How we need to take care to be watchful, lest we sleep. “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2). To live in watchful prayer and faith is to live with thankful hearts before God (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). It is the will of God that we rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks to him in everything. Whatever our present situation is at anytime is the will of God for us (Romans 8:28). We should rejoice and give thanks always (Philippians 4:4-6).

Rejoice in prosperity or adversity. Pray always. Live prayerfully, trusting the Lord. Let praise, prayer, and thanksgiving constantly rise from our hearts to our God. Let us place such high value upon Christ, his righteousness, his boundless grace, his blood atonement, and life eternal from him, in him and with him that nothing in this life overshadows God’s unspeakable gift. How can I complain about anything when I am
an heir of God and joint-heir with Christ?

Our Lord Jesus does not require that we be constantly engaged in the exercise of prayer, but that we always live prayerfully. By all means, spend much time in the exercise of prayer, but more, importantly, live prayerfully.

“Faint Not”
Let us never weary of faith. Let us never get tired of living upon the bounty of our God, of coming to the throne of grace. Can you imagine the hungry widow becoming weary of going to the barrel God constantly filled and getting food for her and her son? Yet, our flesh is so opposed to all that is good for our souls that our Lord constantly reminds us that we must watch, and pray, and faint not! Why are these admonitions so often repeated and in so many ways? Because they are admonitions we need, and need constantly!

Our Lord is not telling us in the parable that if we have a great desire, if we want something bad enough, we ought to just keep asking God for what we want until he gives it. James tells us plainly that such praying is praying amiss (James 3:3).

God never promised to gratify our lusts, not even when our lusts appear to be good and reasonable desires. We do not twist God’s arm in prayer, forcing the Almighty to bow to our will! In prayer we pour out the groans of our hearts to him and bow to his will. Have you no groans, groans for which you cry unto God day and night, groans created in you by his grace, groans that will not allow you rest until they are fulfilled? Of course you do, if you are God’s. I do, too.

We groan for freedom from sin. We groan that we might be conformed to Christ. We groan for our lack of love for God our Saviour, our lack of faith before him, our lack of commitment and devotion to him who loved us and gave himself for us. How we groan before our God for an end of strife, for peace, and an end to sorrow and sighing, toil and temptation, pain and causing
pain, grief and causing grief!

In the parable of the unjust judge our Lord tells us to never quit seeking God’s grace, to never quit living by faith, looking to him and looking for him (Philippians 3:7-14; Hebrews 12:14). His grace will prove sufficient and satisfactory, even when he denies us what we crave for ourselves. Our Lord’s promise, the promise drawn from the parable of the unjust judge is just this. As that unjust judge avenged that helpless widow of her adversary, so too our heavenly Father will soon avenge us of our adversary (Romans 16:20; Revelation 22:4-7). At the appointed hour, the God of Glory, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ gave him the glory he promised him. And at the appointed hour, he will give us the glory he has promised us. Let us therefore pray always and faint not (Hebrews 10:35-39; Habakkuk 2:3).

**Election**
The second thing we see in our Lord’s explanation of this parable is the fact that there is an elect people in this world, loved of God and the objects of his constant care. The Lord Jesus declares that God will “avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him.” “I tell you”, he says, “that he will avenge them speedily.”

God’s elect are his own special, peculiar people, whom he has loved with an everlasting love. We are his by his own sovereign good will and pleasure, chosen in his Son Jesus Christ unto everlasting life and salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. He will avenge them of their adversary and vindicate them before all worlds at the last day, right all wrongs concerning them, do them justice, and deliver them into his heavenly kingdom and glory. And he will do so in accordance with absolute, strict justice, through the merit and efficacy of Christ’s obedience, death, and intercession.
A Bag, A Book, A Bottle
Like this poor widow, they cry unto him day and night. He hears our cries, puts our tears up in his bottle. In a word he cares for us and takes care of us at all times, in all our needs, and forever.

God takes great care to comfort his people in their many trials and sorrows in this world. He commands his preachers to have for one of their goals the comfort of his people. He says, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.” Here are three things described in the Word of God that should be of great comfort to every believer.

The Lord God has made a bag for our sins. Job said, “My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity” (Job 14:17). In ancient times, when men died at sea, their bodies were placed in a weighted bag, which was sewn together and sealed. Then they were cast into the depths of the sea. That is what God has done with our sins. They are cast “into the depths of the sea.” When Christ died, by his one sacrifice for our sins, which were imputed to him, he put away all our sins. They were buried in the sea of God’s infinite forgiveness, put away, never to be brought up again. God Almighty will never charge us with sin, impute sin to us, remember our sins against us, or treat us any the less graciously because of our sin. That is forgiveness! “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”

The Lord has also written a book for our names. Take heart, child of God. Your name is written in the book of God. Before the worlds were made, the Lord God inscribed the names of his elect in the Lamb’s book of life. In that book God has recorded not only the names of the chosen heirs of heaven, but also all things pertaining to them. “In thy book all my members were written” (Psalm 139:16; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 17:8). The Lamb’s book of life is the book of God’s eternal purpose of grace, predestination, and election. The fact that our names are written in that book means that our salvation is a matter of
absolute certainty, and that all things work together for our good by God’s arrangement to secure our predestined end, which is perfect conformity to Christ (Romans 8:28-30). When our Lord says, “Rejoice because your names are written in heaven”, he is telling us that we have nothing to fear. All is well for those whose names are written in heaven.

Moreover, the Lord God keeps a bottle for our tears. “Thou tellest all my wonderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? ... This I know; for God is for me” (Psalm 56:8, 9). It was customary at ancient Egyptian funerals for mourners to have a small cloth or sponge to wipe away their tears. Then, they were squeezed into a small vial, a tear bottle, and placed in the tomb with the dead, symbolizing the care the mourners had for the one who had died. Even so, the Lord our God, our heavenly Father, our almighty Saviour, and our holy Comforter, tenderly cares for us. In all our afflictions he is afflicted. We are the very apple of his eye!

Could anything be more comforting in this world of sin, sorrow, and death? The Lord our God has put our sins in a bag and buried them, our names in a book to remember them, and our tears into a bottle to show his tender care for us. All this shows our Father’s care for his elect.

How we rejoice in God’s electing love! It is one of the sweetest, most blessed, most soul-cheering things revealed in the Book of God (John 15:16; Ephesians 1:3-6; 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14). Election is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, he has decreed in sovereign predestination to deliver the objects of his eternal love from sin, the curse of the law, and eternal damnation, and to deliver them unto eternal glory in, by, and with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Election is the guarantee of eternal salvation by Christ our Surety and the source of all spiritual and eternal blessedness. Little wonder that David danced before the ark when he thought
about God’s election (Psalm 65:4). Election calls for unceasing praise and thanksgiving to our God. Except God had chosen and called us, we would never have chosen and called on him. Except he had chosen us of his own good pleasure, unconditionally, we could never have been chosen, for we could never make ourselves worthy of his choice. Let the Arminian, the works-monger, the will-worshipper rail, and rant, and rave on. We rejoice in electing love! We bless God for the blessing wherewith he has blessed us. Eternal Election! We know and rejoice to sing with Josiah Conder ...

’Tis not that I did choose Thee,
For, Lord, that could not be;
This heart would still refuse Thee,
Hadst Thou not chosen me:
Thou, from the sin that stained me,
Hast washed and set me free,
And to this end ordained me,
That I should live to Thee.

’Twas sovereign mercy called me,
And taught my opening mind,
The world had else enthralled me,
To heavenly glories blind:
My heart owns none before Thee,
For Thy rich grace I thirst
This knowing, if I love Thee,
Thou must have loved me first”!

Are there any marks of election, any tokens by which I can know whether I am one of God’s elect? Indeed, there are! These marks are clearly laid down in Scripture. Election is inseparably connected with faith in Christ and conformity to his image
(Romans 8:29, 30). When Paul saw the working “faith”, and patient “hope”, and labouring “love”, of the Thessalonians, he knew their “election of God” (1 Thessalonians 1:3, 4.). Our Lord gives us this mark of election in the passage before us. God’s elect are a people who “cry unto him day and night.”

And, yes, God shall avenge us. He shall avenge his own elect, “though he bear long with them.” Perhaps these words refer to our adversaries, oppressors, and persecutors. They are vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction. The Lord God endures their wickedness with much longsuffering toward his elect, until the sufferings of his people are accomplished and the iniquities of these reprobate are full.

However, I think the words, “ though he bear long with them” are most properly to be understood as referring to the elect. They might be better translated, “and is longsuffering towards them.” He delays the execution of vengeance upon the world of the ungodly until all his elect are gathered in from among them. Then, our Saviour says, “I tell you, he will avenge them speedily” (v. 8; 2 Peter 3:9, 15).

A Solemn Question

The third thing we see in this passage is the fact that true faith will be a scarce and rare thing in the last day. Our Saviour shows us this by asking a very solemn question in verse 8. “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” The answer is obvious. As it was in the days of Noah and Lot, so shall it be when the Lord Jesus comes again. In the days of Noah only eight souls entered into the ark. In the days of Lot only three were delivered from wrath and judgment. All the rest perished. So shall it be in the end of the world.

“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” If you do, bless God for his free electing love and the gift of his grace upon you. If you believe, salvation and eternal life is yours in Christ. But, if you believe not the Son of God, the wrath of God abides on you
and you shall never see life (John 3:36; 8:24).
“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 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. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14).

Self-righteousness Again

Self-righteousness is the subject of the parable before us. I cannot imagine a subject more disgustingly repugnant, or more commonly and universally indulged. Luke gives us an inspired introduction to the parable in verse 9. “And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.” That which our Lord here denounces is self-righteousness. The purpose of our Lord in this parable is to show the folly and danger of self-righteousness.
All Self-righteous
All men, by nature, are self-righteous. It is the family disease of all the sons of Adam. From the heights to the depths of society, we all think more highly of ourselves than we should. We secretly flatter ourselves that we are not so bad as some, and that we have something that will recommend us to the favour of God. The wise man said, “Most men will proclaim everyone his own goodness.” We forget the plain testimony of holy scripture. “In many things we offend all” (James 3:2). “There is not a man upon the earth, that doeth good and sinneth not” (Ecclesiastes 7:10). “What is man that he should be clean, or he that is born of woman that he should be righteous” (Job 15:14). “They are all under sin; as it is written, there is none righteous, no not one” (Romans 3:9, 10).

Ever since man became a sinner, he has been self-righteous. When man had a perfect righteousness before God, he did not glory in it nor cherish it; but ever since man has fallen and lost all righteousness, he has pretended to be righteous! Immediately after his fall, Adam wrapped himself in his apron of fig leaves and began to defend himself by blaming his troubles on God, who gave to him the woman, and the woman for giving him the fruit.

As it was with Adam, so it is with all men; we justify ourselves before God and men. Self-righteousness is born within us; and while we can, to a degree, control lust, lies, and murder, our self-righteousness will not allow us to confess our sins and come to God for mercy as guilty sinners. Millions of sermons have been preached against self-righteousness, but it remains the number one sin that keeps people from coming to Christ.

One old preacher said, “I scarcely ever preach a sermon without condemning self-righteousness, yet I find I cannot preach it down. Men still boast of who they are, what they have done, what they have not done, and mistake the road to heaven to be one paved by their own works and merit.” God help us!
This parable was addressed to the Lord’s disciples. Multitudes who profess faith in Christ, who avow that the ground of their hope and the foundation of their salvation is Christ alone, and confess that they trust in the merits of Christ, ultimately make Christ only half a Saviour. You would never be so bold as to say that you do not need him at all. But, then, you are highly offended when you are told that your heart is as black, and vile, and corrupt as hell itself. Why is that? Is it not because you trust in yourselves that you are righteous? I plead with you for your very soul’s sake, be honest. You think, “I know I am not as good as I should be, but then I am not so bad as some people. I go to church regularly. I read my Bible. I say my prayers. I am sober, honest, and moral.” Are you not self-righteous?

One Cure
There is only one true cure for self-righteousness, and that is self-knowledge. All the descendants of Adam are sinners, destitute of righteousness, and filled with unrighteousness. Out of your “heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” The same is true of my own. By nature, we are all enemies to righteousness. And we have no power to make ourselves righteous. No matter how righteous you may be in the eyes of men, or in your own eyes, you have no righteousness, unless you have the righteousness of Christ. If it were possible for men to gain righteousness for themselves, then Christ is dead in vain (Galatians 2:21).

Once let the eyes of our understanding be opened by the Spirit of God, and all self-righteousness must fade away. We will talk no more of our own goodness, when we behold his goodness. Once let us see what there is in our hearts, and what the holy law of God requires, and self-conceit will die. Oh, if we can but get a sight of the thrice holy Jehovah, we will cry with
Isaiah, “Woe is me”! We will lay our hands upon our mouths, and cry with the leper, “Unclean, unclean”!

Everyone who goes to the house of worship is set forth in this parable. You either come to God like the self-righteous Pharisee, or you come like the self-abased Publican. May God the Holy Spirit use the study of this parable to the awakening of the self-righteous, to the comfort of those who labour and are heavy laden with sin, and to the edification of all who believe, for the glory of Christ.

**Outwardly The Same**
There is one point at which the Pharisee and the Publican agree. There is one thing that they had in common. They both “went up into the temple to pray.” They both set their faces in the same direction. Outwardly, they both walked in the same path. They entered the same house. So far as we can see, there was no difference whatever in their outward religious behaviour.

The Pharisee and the Publican in this parable remind me of the first men who worshipped God, Cain and Abel. There was a mighty gulf between them. God accepted the one and rejected the other. The difference between the two was in their heart. Cain had a heart full of pride. Because he trusted in himself that he was righteous, God rejected him. Abel had a heart full of shame because of sin. Because he trusted Christ as the Lord his Righteousness, God accepted him. Which are you, the proud, self-righteous Pharisee, or the broken, self-abasing Publican?

Robert Hawker rightly summarized the message of our Lord’s parable when he wrote, “The Pharisee and Publican are as much living characters now, as then, in the days of our Lord. Every man is a Pharisee that is seeking acceptance with God either whole or in part, who prides himself upon his own good deeds, and prayers, and sacraments, and almsgiving; and hath recourse to Christ no further according to his will than to make up (if there should be any) his own deficiency. And every man
may be called a Publican, in the sense of this parable, who from
the teaching of God the Spirit hath been led to behold the Adam-
nature in which he was born, and the condemnation in which he
is involved, both by original, and by actual transgression; and
led by the Holy Ghost to God in Christ, acknowledgeth himself
unmeriting forgiveness, while in sorrow and contrition he seeks
it. Justification is of God in Christ. And therefore the self-
condemned, and not the self-righteous, find justification before
God.”

Their Character
Though they were outwardly the same, in this passage our Lord
Jesus points out four great differences between the Pharisee and
the Publican. He begins the parable by pointing out that there
was a difference in the character of these two men. “The one a
Pharisee, the other a Publican.”

It would be impossible to imagine a more striking contrast in
the opinion of the Jewish nation during the time of our Lord’s
earthly ministry. In the minds of those ancient Jews, the Pharisee
represented the epitome of morality and righteousness. And the
Publican was looked upon with more disgust than a harlot or a
drunkard. Publicans represented the depths of sin and
degradation.

One of these men was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were the
most ancient sect of the Jews. They were thoroughly orthodox in
their doctrine. They believed in the inspiration of Scripture.
They believed in the Messiah. They believed in election,
predestination, and limited atonement. They never dreamed that
any were God’s elect but the Jews, or that atonement was made
for any but the nation of Israel. They believed in the resurrection
of the dead. They even believed in the future punishment of the
wicked, and eternal bliss of the righteous.

The Pharisees were very strict in their observance of the law
and the traditions of the church. They prayed three times in the
day. They fasted twice a week. They gave tithes of everything they possessed. They strictly observed the ceremonies of the law. They were meticulous in their observance of the Sabbath day. They wouldn’t think of missing a church service, or working on the sabbath.

But everything the Pharisees did was to be seen of men. They stood in corners of the streets and made long prayers, so that men coming from both directions could see and hear them. Our Lord tells us that they “made broad the borders of their phylacteries.” That is to say, they sewed pieces of parchment on their long robes, which had scripture texts written on them, so that all men could see how much they loved the law of God.

If they were living today, they would have their shirt pockets stuffed with tracts, carry large Bibles everywhere they go, put bumper stickers on their car saying, “Jesus saves”!, or “Honk if you love Jesus”!, and write, “I love Jesus”, on park benches and overpasses, march in the streets to protest abortion and pornography, and have the Ten Commandments hung in all public buildings. The Pharisees were the most religious people in the world, and everyone knew it. All of their religious exercises were designed to win the applause of men.

There are many today like these Pharisees. They keep up the outward duties of religion so that they may either gain or keep the respect of men. They suppose that, by their religious works, they make God their debtor. They despise all other men, thinking themselves holier than others, who do not observe their traditions. They say, “Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.”

This is far different from the true believer. Those who trust Christ for righteousness know that they are, in themselves, poor, miserable, and guilty. They freely admit that others are much better than they. They despise no one (Philippians 3:3).

The other man in the parable was a Publican. To the Jews, nothing was more offensive than a Publican. The Publicans were
Jews who collected taxes for the Roman government. They usually exacted much more than was due from their countrymen so as to amass wealth for themselves. They were looked upon both by the Jews and the Romans as disgraceful and contemptible. The Jews could make no more vile accusation of Christ’s character than to say that he was the friend of Publicans and sinners.

Their Behaviour
There was a difference in the behaviour of these two worshippers, too. Look at the proud Pharisee. “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself.” The Pharisee went up as close as he could get to the holy place and stood in some conspicuous place so that he could be seen by all. He stood in a fixed, formal posture. He stood apart from the other worshippers, lest he should be defiled, or be thought to be “as other men are”. He stood with great boldness and confidence, as though God were indebted to him. He stood and prayed with himself.

His prayer was altogether centred in himself. He sought nothing but his own glory. He stood before God, being confident of his own righteousness. He stood by himself, with no respect to or faith in Christ the Mediator. Though he addressed God, he praised his own self. We see nothing of humility in this man. He had no inclination even to bow his head before his Creator, much less his heart.

Now, look at the Publican. “The Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast.” The Publican stood afar off in the outer court, as one who was unworthy to enter the presence of him whose name is Holy. This was a testimony of the sense he had of his state and condition before God. He was an unworthy sinner, far off from God, and deserving to be separated from God forever. This was also a display of his reverence for God. This Publican
was not even willing to look up toward heaven. J. C. Ryle said, “He felt the remembrance of his sins so grievous, and the burden of them so intolerable, that, like a child who has offended its father, he dare not look his Almighty Maker in the face.”

The guilt of his sins lay so heavily upon him that he could not look up to heaven. A sense of sin made him blush with shame. Sorrow caused his heart to bow in brokenness and contrition before the throne of God. He was possessed with a fear of God’s well-deserved wrath. This poor sinner knew he was unworthy of any favour from God.

In sorrow, self-abasement, and godly fear, the Publican “smote upon his breast.” He was so overcome by the sinfulness of his heart that he could not control his feelings. He remembered his many sins. He recalled the mercies he had received, and his neglect of them. He knew the life he had led and the God he had despised. And these things came crushing upon his heart like an intolerable burden. He beat upon his breast, pointing to his heart as the fountain of his sins. He beat upon his breast, expressing his sorrow and repentance of sin. He beat upon his breast, showing his abhorrence of sin.

Their Prayers
Third, our Lord shows us a marked difference in the prayers of these two men. Look first at the Pharisee’s pretentious prayer. We can hardly call it a prayer. While he does address himself to God, and acknowledges God’s right to some gratitude upon his part, this proud hypocrite was wrong in everything he said. “God I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”

There are several things that are obviously missing in the Pharisee’s prayer. There is no confession of sin. There is no expression of desire for the glory of God. There is no praise to God. There is no hint of need before God. This man was
perfectly self-satisfied and self-sufficient. He recites complacently what he is not, and proudly boasts of what he is. He gives thanks to God, but only in order to exalt himself.

Proudly, he denies being like other men. He was indeed like all other men. He was a sinner in Adam, he was a sinner by nature, and he was a sinner in heart, just like all other men. He goes on and denies particular sins, of which the Pharisees were guilty. They were guilty of extortion, devouring widow’s houses under religious pretence. They were unjust, being aptly represented by our Lord as unjust stewards. And they were adulterers; our Lord called them an adulterous generation.

Even as he made this prayer, this Pharisee was guilty of all these things before God. He was robbing God of his glory. He was unjustly claiming a right to God’s favour. He was guilty of spiritual adultery, worshipping himself, the worst adultery of all.

Even if he had obeyed the letter of the law perfectly, he was wrong to suppose the literal fulfilment of the law would merit God’s favour. “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.” The Pharisee judged himself by the wrong standard. He compared himself with other men. And he proved himself to be the child of the devil by accusing his brother.

There is no soul in such a dangerous position as the religious hypocrite. No man is in such a hopeless condition as the Pharisee, who has no deep feeling of his own sinfulness. No heart is harder to reach than that which is dead in self-righteous religion.

Now look at the Publican’s prayer. “He smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” This prayer was most instructive, though it was very short. There was a personal, sincere, and full confession of sin. This publican did not confess anyone else’s sins, but his own. He made no excuse for his sin. And this man confessed that he was the greatest sinner who ever lived. A more literal translation of his words would be, “God, be merciful to me the sinner.” He confessed his sinful nature and
his sinful deeds. He speaks as though he were the only sinner in the world. He confesses that God would be perfectly just to punish him in hell forever.

This man made his suit for mercy at the throne of the sovereign God. God was the one he had offended, and God alone could forgive. He pleads with God whose prerogative it is to have mercy on whom he will. He made no promise of reformation, but simply pleaded for mercy. He came with nothing to offer, simply pleading for mercy.

This Publican pleaded for mercy with faith in Christ. The word that is here translated “be merciful to” is found only one other time in the New Testament in Hebrews 2:17. There it is applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, our High Priest. “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.” The word “merciful” means propitious, or reconciling.

The Publican prayed that God would show him mercy through the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, typified under the law. He knew that God could show mercy only by the blood sacrifice of Christ. God forgives sin only when the satisfactory payment has been made. This sinner confessed his entire dependence upon Christ, the Mediator whom God provides, knowing that God must pardon sin in a way that is consistent with his justice. Here is a sinner’s plea, “For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity; for it is great” (Psalm 25:11).

Their End
Fourth, I want you to see that the Pharisee and the Publican were different in their end. “I tell you this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” The proud Pharisee, though he was righteous in his own eyes, was rejected by God. The poor Publican was justified
by faith in Jesus Christ alone. That is to say, he received God’s free gift of justification by faith in Christ. The blood of Christ sprinkled upon his conscience justified him in his own conscience before God. He came up to the temple with a tormenting, guilty conscience. He went home with a conscience of peace, reconciled to God by faith in Christ.

And our Lord Jesus tells us that all who exalt themselves in self-righteousness shall be abased by God. And all who humble themselves in repentance will be exalted with Christ.

A Bold Prophecy
That which our Lord condemns more severely than any other crime is self-righteousness. I would rather stand before God in the day of judgment as a man guilty of lying, theft, adultery, and murder, than stand before him as a man guilty of self-righteousness. Self-righteousness shall be punished with greater severity in eternal damnation than any other offence.

Our Lord spoke this parable to all who trust in themselves and despise others. Who are these people? The Son of God declares that all who trust in themselves, all who vainly imagine that they make themselves righteous by something they do, are self-righteous. They ignorantly imagine that they justify themselves (Luke 16:15).

If you will read Isaiah 65:1-7, you will see exactly what God thinks of self-righteousness and what he says about all who trust in themselves that they are righteous, while despising others. The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 10 that Isaiah was very bold in making this prophecy. It required the boldness of firm conviction and divine anointing for the servant of God to speak for God in the day when the people who claimed to worship God were wholly given over to idolatry, superstition, and will worship. It required boldness for the man of God to expose the self-righteousness of his own nation, declaring them to be a people who, because of the delusions of their perverse religion
and the depravity of their hearts, were a people “Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.” Then he adds this word from God concerning the people to whom he preached “These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.”

Thus, the prophet of God boldly delivered the Word of the Lord. In a day when the people were wholly given over to legality, he preached the gospel. When his nation was filled with pride and self-righteousness, proudly presuming that they were alone the people of God, he boldly denounced them as hypocrites. When they thought they had God in their pocket, God’s prophet boldly affirmed God’s electing grace and announced his rejection of the Jewish nation. Perhaps it was his boldness that provoked Manasseh’s wrath, which resulted in Isaiah being cruelly put to death, being sawn asunder by the king’s order.

The sins of Israel were open and undeniable. They pretended to worship the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but did so in total violation of the first and second commandments. They mixed the worship of other gods with the worship of Jehovah. They used icons, images, and symbols in the worship of God. These things were expressly forbidden by God even in the Old Testament (Exodus 20:3, 4). They worshipped the Lord, or at least pretended to, upon ornate altars of brick, altars of their own making, in places of their own choosing. Again, they did so in direct violation of holy scripture (Exodus 20:24-26). The Jews even practised necromancy, pretending that they communed with the dead. They practised witchcraft and sorcery, incorporating magic into their worship!

To top it all off, they were guilty of horrid self-righteousness. They carried their self-righteousness to such a pitch that they vainly and proudly imagined that if they even rubbed up against someone else on the streets, they would be polluted and defiled. Therefore, the Lord God here declared
them to be to him as smoke in a man’s nose, abhorrent and intolerable.

Isaiah’s bold prophecy is as applicable to our day as it was to his. There are many today who pretend to worship the Lord God who must be honestly exposed for that self-righteousness that says, “Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou.” Multitudes today, who spend every Sunday in the house of God, spend the day as “a smoke in God’s nose.”

We must constantly guard against self-righteousness. It is at its heart the idea that we can make ourselves righteous, that we obtain righteousness by something we do, because of who we are, who we are related to, what we experience, or feel. Self-righteousness is trust in ourselves (Luke 18:9).

Self-righteousness is a refuge of lies, by which men and women deceive their own hearts, a bed that is too short for a man to stretch himself upon it, and a covering too narrow to wrap himself in. It is in God’s eyes the most offensive, obnoxious, and loathsome of all evils in this world. Yet, it is that which is most appealing to our flesh, that by which we are most likely to be deceived. Unless God delivers us from the horrible snare of self-righteousness, we will perish forever under his wrath.

Seven Statements

Here are seven plain statements about self-righteousness. Some of them are biting and painful, I know. Some are very offensive to many. But they must be made. I must be faithful in my generation, as Isaiah was in his, and boldly expose the self-righteousness by which Satan would destroy your soul.

Self-righteousness grows and flourishes best in religious soil. This is an enemy found within our own walls. It is not something we have to look for in the dark alleys of the profane. Self-righteousness is perfectly at home in the assembly of God’s saints, and in the practice of religious duties (Isaiah 1:10-15;
Self-righteousness is not an evil found only among the unregenerate and unbelieving of the world. It is an evil with which believers constantly struggle. It is like a huge cobweb on our souls that we simply cannot pull off. You can mark this down as a rule by which to determine whether or not our behaviour is self-righteous. Anything done to be seen of and to call the attention of others to ourselves is abhorrently self-righteous (Matthew 6:1-6). Self-righteousness grows and flourishes in religious soil; but you will find it outside the church, too.

Self-righteousness is common among the base and profane of the world as well. This sin abounds where you might least expect it. Nothing is more ridiculous than to hear men and women who are openly vile talk about morality, social values, and ethical uprightness. Yet, we should not be surprised by this. The scriptures give us examples of such things and warn us that the time would come when men would call good evil and evil good.

Self-righteousness always makes men and women harsh, hard, and judgmental regarding others (Luke 18:9).

Self-righteousness will not bow to the authority of the Word of God alone. It must have traditions, customs, religious rules and laws, denominational authority, creeds, and confessions and historic backing (Matthew 15:7-9).

Self-righteousness will never acknowledge and confess sin. Believers confess their sins in bitterness of soul (Psalm 51:1-5; 1 John 1:9). Self-righteousness talks about sin in terms of weaknesses and makes excuses for it. Utter, personal depravity, self-righteousness will never acknowledge.

Self-righteousness will not trust Christ alone. Our only hope of righteousness is Christ, “The Lord our Righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:6; 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31). Self-righteousness makes the obedient, righteous, and sin-atoning sacrifice of Christ of none effect (Galatians 2:20, 21). But self-righteousness
will not submit to the righteousness of God (Romans 9:31-10:4).

Self-righteousness most effectually bars a sinner from God’s grace and salvation. Your sin will not keep you from Christ, but your righteousness will. None are too bad to be saved, but multitudes are too good!

My Confession And My Hope

“I know that in me, that is, in my flesh dwelleth no good thing.” From the soul of my foot to the crown of my head, there is no goodness in me, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores (Isaiah 64:6). My only hope before God is Christ, whose name is Jehovah-Tsidkenu, “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16; 1 Corinthians 1:30, 31).

Not what these hands have done
Can save this guilty soul;
Not what this toiling flesh has borne,
Can make my spirit whole.

Not what I feel or do,
Can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers, or sighs, or tears,
Can ease my awful load.

Thy work alone, my Saviour,
Can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,
Can give me peace within.

Thy love to me, O God,
Not mine, O Lord, to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest,
And set my spirit free.
No other work save Thine,
No meaner blood will do;
No strength save that which is Divine,
Can bear me safely through.

Thy grace alone, O God,
To me can pardon speak;
Thy power alone, O Son of God,
Can this sore bondage break.

I bless the Christ of God,
I rest on love Divine;
And with unfaltering lip and heart
I call the Saviour mine.

Horatius Bonar
“And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 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. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein” (Luke 18:15-17).

Infants And The Kingdom Of God

This short passage of holy scripture sets before us one of our Master’s most important lessons. Here our Saviour teaches us that all who enter into the Kingdom of God, all who are saved by the grace of God must come to Christ in simple faith, as little children.

Yet, very few passages in the New Testament have been so perversely twisted to teach false doctrine as these three verses. For that reason, I must, at least briefly, address two of the perverse things men most commonly use these verses to teach.

**Infant Baptism**

Papists and those who continue to practise the Romish ritual commonly refer to these verses as a defence of sprinkling water on babies, that which is commonly referred to as “infant baptism”.

If there were any place in the Bible where we might expect
to find some mention or example of “infant sprinkling”, this would be the place; but that is not the case. This practice of what is called “infant baptism” is totally without foundation in holy scripture. There is not so much as one word in the Bible that teaches, or even implies it. And there is not a single example of it in the entire Bible. It is a practice of purely Roman Catholic origin. It is vainly hoped, by those who practise infant sprinkling, that the baby sprinkled with a little water is thereby regenerated, or at least given one foot up toward God. The practice is, of course, totally contrary to the plainest declaration of holy scripture, both with regard to salvation and baptism.

It is a complete contradiction of the gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ. Salvation does not come by water, be it much or little, but by grace. It is not the result of some man’s priestly pretence, but of God’s sovereign operation.

Infant sprinkling is also totally contrary to the teaching of holy scripture about baptism. Baptism is immersion, picturing the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and our death, burial, and resurrection with him (Romans 6:3-6). It is called “believer’s baptism”, because only believers are to be baptized. Baptism is the believer’s public, symbolic confession of faith in Christ.

These verses are also used by many to defend the practice of talking little children into making a “decision for Jesus” and calling it salvation. I do not think, or suggest, that the Bible teaches what men call an “age of accountability”. That is not the issue. The issue is faith in Christ. Neither men and women, nor children, who are born of God, need to be manipulated into professing faith in Christ. Indeed, if someone talked you into a profession of faith, you know that it was no more than that. You may hold onto it until you go to hell; but what you have is not salvation, but just a religious profession. When God the Holy Spirit saves sinners, giving them faith in Christ, they are made willing disciples of the Son of God.
Exposition
Having said that, I will say no more, though much more needs to be said, said boldly, and said often about such perverse religious practices. Let me give you a brief exposition of these three verses. Then I will give you the Master’s message in them.

“And they brought unto him also infants.” The word translated “infants” is used with regard to unborn children, little babies, and young children (Luke 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; 18:15; Acts 7:19; 2 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 2:2). On this occasion, people brought these infants to the Saviour, just as others brought adults to him who were sick, that they might be healed by his touch, as we see in the next words.

“That he would touch them.” They brought these children to the Master that he might, as was his custom, heal them of their diseases by touching them.

“But when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them.” The disciples rebuked those who brought these sick children to the Master. We are not told why the disciples’ rebuked them. They may very well have had what they thought were good reasons for doing so. In fact, that appears to have been the case, because the Lord Jesus did not in any way scold them for their action. But this much is certain. They did not bring the children to the Saviour to be baptized by him. John Gill explained …

“From this rebuke and prohibition of the disciples, it looks plainly as if it had never been the practice of the Jews, nor of John the Baptist, nor of Christ and his disciples, to baptize infants. Had this been then in use, they would scarcely have forbidden and rebuked those that brought them, since they might have thought they brought them to be baptized. But knowing of no such usage that ever obtained in that nation, neither among those that did, or did not believe in Christ, they forbad them.”

“But Jesus called them unto him.” The Lord Jesus called for these children who were brought to come to him. That fact is
sufficient to tell us that these “infants” were not infants in the way we commonly speak of infants. They were obviously young children, probably less than twelve years old, but not new-born babies, or nursing babies. They were at least old enough to be capable of coming to the Master on their own.

When he called the children to himself, stretching out his arms to receive them, the Master said, to his disciples, “suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not.” Our Lord Jesus was such a gracious, humble, accommodating man that he readily seized the opportunity to tenderly embrace young children, take them on his lap, and minister to them. He was so gracious, gentle, and kind that young children were perfectly comfortable in approaching him.

“For of such is the kingdom of God.” It is as if our Lord said, “Do not drive these children away from me. Let them come, and I will teach you something. These children are a good picture of what I require all my children to be: trusting and dependent, harmless and inoffensive, free from bitterness and malice, meek, modest, and humble, without pride, arrogance, and ambition, having no desire for greatness, just children.”

“Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God”, that is receive Christ as his King, believing his doctrine, bowing to his authority, obeying his will. “As a little child”, in simple faith, meekly, humbly, trusting him as Lord and Saviour. “Shall in no wise enter therein.” In a word, our Saviour here tells us that there is no true faith except that faith that is exemplified in childlike qualities. What a profound, needful, vital message this is! May God give us grace to receive it. “Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.”

**Four Lessons**

There are four things in our Lord’s message that must not go unnoticed. First, we must understand that when the Lord Jesus
comes in saving power and grace into the lives of chosen sinners, he comes as a king to set up his kingdom. He does not come begging for admission. He comes into the hearts of chosen sinners in sovereign, omnipotent mercy. He binds Satan, spoils him of his goods, casts him out, and takes possession of his house.

Second, if we are to come into this kingdom, we must be brought to Christ the King, and brought into the kingdom as little children. Our Master says, “Of such is the kingdom of heaven” (v. 17). Mark those words. There are children in every kingdom, and there are children in our Lord’s kingdom. John Newton once said, “The majority of persons who are now in the kingdom of God are children.” I would not argue the point. When I think of all the multitudes of babies who have died in infancy, who are now swarming in the streets of glory, I rejoice in God’s great wisdom and goodness. Though adults, generation after generation, die in rebellion and unbelief, countless multitudes of infant children have entered into the kingdom of heaven, saved by the grace of God, through the death of Christ, and forever sing the high praises of their great Redeemer and Friend before the eternal throne of his glory. “Of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

I have no hesitancy in asserting that infants dying in infancy (that includes the infants slaughtered in abortion, burned upon heathen altars, the infants of Papists, Mohammedans, and Buddhists) enter the kingdom God. I am fully convinced that all of our race who die in infancy are the objects of God’s eternal love, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and born again by God the Holy Spirit. Let others object, if they please. For my part, I am delighted with this. Everything I read in the Book of God convinces me of it. All who leave this world as babies are saved.

A few years ago, I received a lengthy, sad letter from a dear friend of mine in another state. She and her husband married fairly late in life, just two or three years earlier. They had been
trying to have a child. You can imagine their elation when they learned that she was pregnant. Then, my dear friend miscarried. You can imagine their disappointment. She wrote to ask, “Was my unborn child a human being? At what point is an unborn child a living person? Is my child in heaven?” You can imagine my elation as I wrote back and said, “Yes, your baby is one of Christ’s jewels, taken from your womb into his everlasting arms and into his glory.

How are they saved? How do they enter the kingdom? By works? By the exercise of their will? Of course not! They enter the kingdom by the mighty operations of God’s free grace. And if we enter the kingdom of God that is exactly the way we will enter it.

How do they receive the kingdom? Our Lord Jesus tells us that however they receive it, so must we receive it. Certainly, children do not receive it by birth or blood, for we are expressly told in John’s Gospel that the children of God are born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh. All privilege of descent is now abolished, and no baby enters into heaven because it was born of godly parents, neither shall any be shut out because his parents are atheists, or idolaters, or ungodly. If saved, as we assuredly believe they are, infants must be saved simply according to the will and good pleasure of God, because he has made them his own by election, redemption, and regeneration.

Notice this, too. “They brought unto him infants.” These young children were brought to Christ. The word means “brought and presented”. So sinners, if ever they enter into the kingdom of God, must be brought by God the Holy Spirit, brought by omnipotent, irresistible grace and power, and presented to Christ, presented to him as the reward of his soul’s travail. Thus, “he shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”

Third, our Lord Jesus is a king and his kingdom a kingdom that must be received by faith. All Christ’s subjects want to be
his subjects. All his servants are willing, voluntary, bondservants. We serve him because we want to serve him. All that is done in the service of Christ is done because of love and gratitude to him, freely and voluntarily. And, if ever you are saved, if ever you enter into the kingdom of God, you must come to Christ yourself, and receive Christ yourself. And his promise is, “him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.”

Fourth, the primary thing in this short message is this: All who receive this King and kingdom, all who enter into the church and kingdom of God must do so as little children. Let me show you what that means.

**Utter Dependence**
A little child is completely and utterly dependent. That is as good and clear a picture of faith in Christ as I can imagine. Saving faith is complete, utter dependence upon Christ; dependence upon him alone as our Saviour (1 Corinthians 1:30, 31), dependence upon him alone as our Lord (Proverbs 3:5, 6), dependence upon him alone as our Advocate and Intercessor.

**Modesty**
A little child is humble, modest, unassuming. He knows that he is just a child. Being just a child, he owns nothing. Faith comes to Christ as absolute Lord and King, giving up all things to him, willingly acknowledging that all things are his. Possessing nothing, faith looks to Christ for everything, offering him nothing. We trust his expiation, not our experience. We trust his mediation, not our morality. We trust his work, not our works. We trust his sanctification, not our sanctity. We trust his Priesthood, not our piety. We trust his sacrifice, not our service.

**Tender Love**
A little child is tender and loving. The younger the child, the more this is true. A young child is crushed by a loving father’s
disapproval, or a loving mother’s frown. He loves mum and dad. He craves nothing more than to do for them, honour them, and enjoy their approval and delight.

So it is with God’s saints. I am not saying this is the way it is with religious people, or even with very devoted religious people. But this is the way it is with God’s people. Believers love Christ and want to serve and honour him (2 Corinthians 5:14, 15; 1 John 4:19).

When my daughter, Faith, was just four or five years old, she did something that illustrates this love-inspired service to Christ. I had been away preaching. As I neared home, I called to tell my wife when I would arrive. As I drove up to the house, I saw that beautiful little girl sitting on the front steps, waiting for her daddy. When I opened the door, before I could get out of my truck, she came running to greet me. As she ran, she pulled her hand from behind her back. She had picked a handful of dandelions for her daddy. As she ran, the wind started to blow. It blew all the fuzzy tops off those weeds. When Faith handed them to me, she started to cry, because her flowers were just ugly stems. I started to cry, too, because they were the most beautiful flowers I had ever seen. How so? She had picked those dandelions just for me, just because of her love for me, just because she wanted to do something to please me. That made those ugly dandelion weeds, that no one wants, more beautiful to me than any flower on earth. That is just the way God’s people serve Him; and that is just the way he receives our wretched attempts at honouring him for Christ’s sake (1 Peter 2:5).

Sincerity
A little child is an open book, honest, sincere, and without guile. Pretence, hypocrisy, and show are things a little child plays. He doesn’t try to live them. Did you ever listen to a little child pray? He does not try to frame his words in impressive sentences, or
attempt to show what he knows. The little child simply tells the Lord God what he wants, what he wants to know, and gives thanks.

**Teachable**
Children are teachable. They are not just teachable. They are anxious to learn. Little children do not have to be convinced of anything by argument and reason, science and logic. They simply embrace the things plainly revealed to them. That is why they learn so much so quickly. They never debate the obvious. They do not try to make simple things complex.

When our grandson, Will, was five or six years old, he and his dad were walking around in a store chatting. Doug had been talking to him about God creating all things. As Doug was looking at some doors, Will said, “God made that door.” Doug smiled, and began to explain the process of the door being manufactured by men, who got the wood from trees God had made, with the skills God had given them. When his dad finished explaining the details, Will responded, “That’s what I said, God made the door.” He had learned what his father taught him about God making everything. The detailed explanation was not needed.

**Not Envious**
A little child is relatively free of envy and ambition. Those things they learn by observing us. Two children who are friends do not even think about what the other is wearing, how big or little their houses are, what kind of car their parents drive, how much money their parents have in the bank, or what their family heritage is. And they pay no attention to the colour of their skin.

**Forgiving**
One more thing you cannot help observing about children. They are quick to forgive. God give us grace ever to come to him, as
little children, trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, forgiving as we have been forgiven (Ephesians 4:32-5:2).

“And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. 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. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein.”
Chapter 24

“And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. 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. And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up. Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich. And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 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. And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:18-27).

“Yet Lackest Thou One Thing”

This story of the rich young ruler is reported three times in the four gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke were all inspired of God to record the history of the rich man who came to Christ. That fact alone is enough to call our attention to its importance. It tells us that there are lessons in the story that demand special attention. When the Lord Jesus restored Peter, he compelled him
to confess his love for him three times (John 21). When the Lord God would impress upon that same disciple his commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, he sent him a vision which was repeated three times (Acts 10).

The Rich Ruler
Here is a man who is anxious about his soul and concerned about eternal life. Such men are rare. He was rich; but he was concerned about his soul. He was young; but he was interested in eternity. He was a ruler among men; but he came to be taught by the Lord Jesus. This rich young ruler comes running up to the Lord Jesus, and says, “Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Our Lord knew the man’s heart. He knew that this young man was thoroughly familiar with the law of Moses. And he knew that the young man thought, like most people do, that eternal life could be gained by outward morality, that is to say, by obedience to the law. Therefore, he answered this young man according to the law. He told him to keep the commandments. The rich young ruler responded, “All these have I kept from my youth up.” Then, the Master said to him, “Yet lackest thou one thing.”

Some who read these lines are, I do not doubt, like this rich young ruler. “Yet lackest thou one thing.” You are very moral. “Yet lackest thou one thing.” You are quite respectable in the eyes of men. “Yet lackest thou one thing.” You believe in God. You believe the Bible to be the Word of God. And it can be said, at least in some sense, that you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. You believe that he is God. You believe in his death, burial, and resurrection as the sinner’s Substitute. You even know that Jesus Christ the Lord is the sinner’s only hope of salvation before God. Yet, for all that, you know that you are not a child of God, a saved person, and an heir to eternal life. “Yet lackest thou one thing.” Many there are, who are outwardly good, moral, respectable, religious people, who yet lack that one thing which
is essential to eternal life.

The Ruler’s Question

“And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” This is a question people often ask when they are faced with eternity, when they hear the gospel preached, when their sin is exposed, and they are terrified with the thought of everlasting hell. We have heard it many times. The Jews, the publicans, and the soldiers, one after another, asked the Saviour, “What shall we do then?” (Luke 3:10, 12, 14). The men of Judea asked Peter and the disciples, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). The Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30)

Looking at this question by itself, it appears to be a very noble one, one that we all should ask. We have seen this question many times in the scriptures. And many who asked it became believers and were saved by the grace of God. They were given eternal life. On the day of Pentecost, a large number of men, after they heard the gospel message, were pricked in their hearts and cried, “Men and brethren, What shall we do?” The Philippian jailer, with a broken and submissive heart, cried, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

But there was a great difference as this rich young ruler asked this question. His heart was not broken with conviction. His soul was not humbled with a sense of sin. He was proud and self-righteous. He felt that he was sufficient in himself to meet whatever might be required of him. In essence, he was saying to the Lord Jesus, “You tell me what God requires, and I will do it”! He had a zeal of righteousness and going about to establish his own righteousness, he had not submitted (and would not submit) himself to the righteousness of God” (Romans 9:31-10:4). How many there are like those Jews described by Paul and like this rich young ruler: very moral, very proud, and very lost!
There is much about this young man that is commendable. He was not a base, profligate rebel. He was moral, religious, and devout. He had been a respectful and obedient son to his parents. If he was married, we may be sure he was a good husband, a good father, and a good provider for his family. He was a hardworking, honest man who had acquired much wealth. He was a good neighbour, a respected community leader.

In a day of abounding unbelief, he came to Christ of his own accord. He came not to have some disease healed, not to plead for a helpless child, not to see some great miracle, but out of concern for his immortal soul. He was earnest and sincere. Mark tells us that he came running to Christ. He was orthodox in his creed. He was a highly respected religious leader. He believed in God. He believed the holy scriptures. He believed in the reality of eternal life. He was very strict and devout in his practice of religion. Since the days of his youth, he had outwardly kept the law of God. His life was meticulously moral and precise. And he even worshipped Christ. Again, Mark tells us that when he came to Christ, he kneeled down before him. Like Nicodemus, this young man realized that Jesus Christ was a teacher come from God.

He seems even to have acknowledged our Lord’s Deity. When the Lord asserted that no man is good, but God only, the young ruler did not withdraw his statement. He seems to have acknowledged that Christ is God.

Yet, this young man demonstrated two very sorrowful characteristics. Two things about this rich young ruler’s character show us that he was a lost, ruined, unregenerate man. First, he was ignorant of all spiritual truth. He knew much in a natural sense, but spiritually, regarding spiritual things, he was as ignorant as a man who had never heard of God. He was ignorant of God’s holy character. He was ignorant of his own sinfulness. He was ignorant of the law’s spiritual nature. He thought that the law only required outward obedience. And he
was altogether ignorant of the gospel of Christ (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

And, second, this rich young ruler was dreadfully self-righteous. Beware of self-righteousness! No sin is more deadly, and more likely to keep you from Christ than the sin of self-righteousness. And no sin is more common to man.

The Lord Jesus answered this man’s question plainly. The man asked what he could do to win God’s favour, and Christ told him if you want salvation by human merit, you have got to keep the law.

“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God. 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” (vv. 19, 20).

As far as he understood the law in its outward requirement, he had kept it. He was like Paul, “as touching the law, blameless”. “And he said, All these have I kept from my youth up” (v. 21).

But he was not all that he thought he was. He did not in reality keep the commandments at all. The law must be kept perfectly, or it is not kept at all. The law must be kept in all points, or it is not kept at all. The law must be kept at all times, or it is not kept at all. The law must be kept outwardly, or it is not kept at all. The law must be kept inwardly, or it is not kept at all.

God never intended the law to be a means of salvation. Its design is to show man God’s holy character and his own condemnation and guilt. The law condemns, but can never give life. The law demands, but can never give grace (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; 3:10).

“Run”, “do”, and “work”, the law commands, 
But gives me neither feet nor hands.
God requires “truth in the inward parts;” but we break the commandments of the law in our hearts and thoughts, even when we do not break them in outward actions (Psalm 51:6; Matthew 5:21-28). To be delivered from blindness regarding ourselves is one of the first things needful to our salvation. The eyes of our understandings must be enlightened by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:18). We must learn to know ourselves. No man who is taught of the Spirit will ever talk of having kept God’s holy law. Those who are taught of God confess with Paul, “The law is spiritual, but I am carnal.” “I know that in me dwells no good thing” (Romans 7:14-18).

Yet Lackest Thou
Second, the Lord Jesus said to this rich young ruler. “Yet lackest thou one thing” (v. 22). If one of our modern soul-winners could find a young man like this, he would have him under the water, dried off, and in the pulpit in no time. But our Lord was not trying to get another decision to put on his promotional charts as a “soul-winning evangelist”. He laboured for the souls of men. He was both compassionate and honest. Therefore, he showed the young man exactly what he lacked. He was not lacking in morality, in religious duty, in orthodoxy, in sincerity, or in zeal. But he was lacking one essential thing. What was that one thing he lacked? What is that one thing we must have if we would inherit eternal life? Faith in Christ!

The young man boasted that he loved his neighbour as himself, that he honoured his parents, that he kept the commandments. Therefore Christ put him to a test. The Lord Jesus said to him, “Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me” (v. 22).

Look at this command for a moment. It is a fourfold
commandment. Our Lord commanded this young man to surrender to his authority as his Lord. “Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor.” The Lord Jesus commanded the man to trust him. He said, “come”. To come to Christ is to believe him. It is the exercise of faith in him. “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Mark adds these words: “take up thy cross”. That is to say, our Lord commanded the man to confess him. And he commanded this young man to obey him. He said, “follow me”. These are the things which our Lord requires of all his people: Submission, Faith, Confession, and Obedience.

The Master had a good reason for giving this command to this particular man. He was probing at the young man’s heart. He wanted to expose his point of rebellion. He was determined to show this young man exactly what he was lacking. This man’s money was his god. That was his point of rebellion. God always meets the sinner at his point of rebellion. J. C. Ryle’s observation on this passage may be alarming; but it is true. We will be wise to heed it.

“We must be willing to part with anything, however dear it may be, if it stands between us and our salvation. We must be ready to cut off the right hand and pluck out the right eye, to make any sacrifice, and to break any idol. Life, we must remember, eternal life is at stake! One leak neglected, is enough to sink a mighty ship. One besetting sin, obstinately clung to, is enough to shut a soul out of heaven. The love of money, secretly nourished in the heart, is enough to bring a man, in other respects moral and irreproachable, down to the pit of hell.”

Our Lord’s command was intended to expose the evil of this young man’s heart. It was designed to destroy his self-confidence and pride. It was our Lord’s purpose to show the impossibility of salvation by works. This command was designed to show this sinner the necessity of the gospel. By this one, pointed command our Lord stripped away the fig leaves of
his self-righteousness, exposed the foolishness of his pride, and showed him his need of the grace of God and his need of a Substitute.

The rich young ruler’s one fatal deficiency was a deficiency of the heart. Like Simon Magus, his heart was not right in the sight of God. He was yet unregenerate. He was in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. His heart was not broken. His Spirit was not humbled. He would not surrender to Christ as Lord. God met him at his point of rebellion, and he would not bow. He would not come to Christ alone, trusting him alone for salvation. He would not confess Christ as Lord. He would not obey Christ as his Lord. “And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.”

Are you like this young man? Might our Saviour’s words to him be addressed to you? “Yet lackest thou one thing.” You have one fatal deficiency. Your heart is not right before God. If ever you are saved, your heart must be broken (Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 66:2). And the only way for your heart to be broken is for God to reveal himself to you and in you in the fulness of his grace and glory in Christ (Zechariah 12:10). Unless God himself breaks your heart, it will never be broken; and you will never be saved. You must be born again by almighty grace. A new heart must be created within you.

An Impossible Task

“And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 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” (vv. 24, 25).

This is a fact we see confirmed on every side. Our own eyes will tell us that grace and riches seldom go together. “Not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Corinthians 1:26). It is a plain matter of fact that comparatively few rich men are to be found in the way of life. I cannot tell you exactly why that is so;
but for one thing, riches incline their possessors to pride, self-will, self-indulgence, and love of the world. For another thing, the rich are seldom dealt with faithfully about their souls. They are generally flattered and fawned over by preachers. “The rich hath many friends” (Proverbs 14:20). Few people have the courage to tell a rich man the whole truth. They are flattered, bragged on, and doted over. The result is that while their hearts are choked with the things of the world, their eyes are blinded to their own condition before God.

We are fools to envy the rich of this world and their possessions. If we had what they have, we would probably be like them, as the stalled ox being fattened for the slaughter. Money craved, longed for, coveted, and adored is money that keeps myriads of souls out of heaven! “Those who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare.” Happy is he who has learned to pray, “Give me neither poverty nor riches”, and is really content with such things as he has (1 Timothy 6:9; Proverbs 30:8; Hebrews 13:5).

Many try to make our Master’s words mean less than they do; but they mean exactly what they appear to mean. No more and no less. “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 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.”

Who Then?
When the disciples saw and heard these things, they were astonished, and cried “Who then can be saved?” Our Lord gives us a plain answer to that question. “And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved? And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (vv. 26, 27).

The word of God gives us many striking instances of rich men who were saved. Abraham, David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, Josiah, Job and Daniel were all very great and
wealthy men in this world. Yet they were all sinners saved by the grace of God. And what God did for them by his grace, he can do for any, even for you and for me.

With men, any men and all men, salvation is impossible. But, blessed be God, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God”! That means my case is not hopeless. That means your case is not hopeless. It matters not who we are, where we live, what our position in this world is, whether rich or poor, moral or immoral, great or insignificant, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God”! Grace, and not place, is the hinge upon which salvation turns (John 1:12, 13; Romans 9:15, 16; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Psalms 65:4; 110:3).

If ever the Almighty God puts his hand upon you, you will be saved. “Who then can be saved?” I will tell you who can and shall be saved. All who were chosen of God in electing love, all who were redeemed by the blood of Christ, all who are born-again by God the Holy Spirit, all who are called by almighty grace, all who come to Christ in faith can be saved and most assuredly shall be saved.

“Who then can be saved?” If you are not saved, it is not because there is no love in Christ for sinners. It is not because Christ is not able, willing, and ready to save sinners. If you are not saved, it is because, “Ye will not come to Christ, that ye might have life.” It is because “yet lackest thou one thing”. It is because you refuse to choose that “one thing needful”, the One Thing you must have, Christ Jesus the Lord (Luke 10:42).

If you do come to Christ, if you choose that “one thing needful”, if you are saved, it will be due entirely to the grace of God. May God give you his grace and cause you to choose “that good part”, Christ Jesus. If he will, you will possess him forever. He is the one thing that “shall not be taken away” from you.
“Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. 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. 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 prophets 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. And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken” (Luke 18:28-34).

A Promise, A Prophecy, And A Problem

In Luke 18:18-27 we read about the rich young ruler who came to the Lord Jesus, fell on his knees, and worshipped him saying, “Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” You know the story. The Master said to him, “Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.” This rich young ruler looked at all he had, looked at what Christ required, counted the cost, and said, “No.” He chose to save his life and lost it.
That rich young ruler possessed three things. He possessed them and they possessed him. They are snares by which Satan keeps multitudes from faith in Christ. First, religion without Christ: the rich young ruler was a self-righteous religionists. He was like those who eat and drink unworthily in 1 Corinthians 11. He presumed that he knew God, but did not.

Second, the care of this world: he was a ruler among men, and had many great cares. Third, the deceitfulness of riches: the young ruler, that lost, self-righteous religious man had great wealth.

When he walked away from the Saviour, the Master said, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 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.” The disciples were astonished. They said, “Who then can be saved?” If it is left up to men, it is impossible. But, blessed be his name forever, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” “With God all things are possible.”

The Lord Jesus had just told the rich young ruler that if he would forsake all and follow him, he would have treasure in heaven. Peter latched onto that and said to the Saviour, “We’ve done that. We’ve forsaken all and followed you.” And Matthew tells us he then asked, “What shall we have therefore.”

There is nothing in Peter’s question that implied pride, arrogance, ambition, or unbelief. He did not say, “I have forsaken all. What shall I have?” He said, “we”. And the Lord Jesus said nothing to correct him or chastise him. Neither will I. The fact is if I had heard what Peter had just heard, I suspect I would have asked the same thing. In fact, I have asked the same thing. I am very interested in knowing what that treasure is that is laid up for us in heaven. Aren’t you?

A Promise
Here is the Saviour’s answer to Peter’s question. “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” (vv. 29, 30).

Our Saviour here makes a broad, blessed promise to all who follow him regarding his all-sufficient, boundless grace. It is not merely a promise about the glory that awaits us, but is primarily about the grace that is ours in this world. Yes, in the world to come we shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away and everlasting blessedness beyond the scope of human imagination. But our Saviour here promises us that all who forsake all and follow him shall “receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.” This promise refers distinctly to the life that now is. It is spoken of as “this present time”.

We will never suffer loss at the hands of our Master! He promises us “manifold more” than we forsake by following him. Does that mean that we will have greater riches, more property, greater fame, better health, a more tranquil life in this world, as the “health, wealth, prosperity” wolves of today promise? Of course not!

Our Lord’s promise obviously has a higher meaning. The “manifold more” of the promise refers not to carnal, but to spiritual things. Our Lord Jesus always gives infinitely better than he gets. He here promises us that he will give us, “in this present time”, indescribably more than we will ever be obliged to give up for his sake.

Yes, we must lose our lives to save them. We must forsake all, if we would have Christ. But giving up our lives is giving up nothing. The life we get is everything. What we forsake for Christ is nothing. What we get is Christ, who is all! For this Pearl of Great Price, any man who will not sell all that he has is a fool.

Come, sell all that you have and buy the Pearl of Great
Price, the Lord Jesus Christ, without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1), and you shall find everything your soul needs in him. You will have no lack of righteousness, for he is the Lord our Righteousness. You will have no lack of atonement, for the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. You will have no lack of holiness, for Christ is our Sanctification. And you will have no lack of grace, for all grace is ours in Christ. In Christ you will find everything your soul needs. Our Lord’s disciples found it so, and we shall, too (Luke 22:35).

“My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”! He will give you, “in this present time”, such peace, hope, joy, comfort, and rest in sweet communion with himself, that you shall never lack anything. The Lord Jesus Christ shall be more to you than money, or property, or relatives, or friends. In our darkest hours he keeps them in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon him (Isaiah 26:3). He will give you grace to glory in tribulation and take pleasure in reproaches, in infirmities, and in persecutions for his sake (Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 12:10). In your greatest heaviness, he will give you such joy unspeakable and full of glory that you will count it an honour to suffer shame for his name’s sake (1 Peter 1:18; Acts 5:41; Romans 8:28; 11:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:25).

Friends have often proved faithless. Great promises have often been broken. Riches have made themselves wings and flown away. But not one of Christ’s promises has ever fallen to the ground. Yes, “my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus”! “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?” (Romans 8:32).

In a word, no matter how long “this present time” shall last, no matter what woes “this present time” shall bring, no matter how dark “this present time” shall appear, the Lord God, our great and gracious Saviour, promises to all who forsake all and
follow him, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). There is an infinite, super-abounding, overflowing sufficiency in the grace of God to meet all the needs of all his people forever. No matter who you are, no matter what your needs may be, no matter what circumstances you are in, if you are a believer, if you trust the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord God says to you, “My grace is sufficient for thee”! His grace is sufficient to sustain you in your trials (Isaiah 43:1-5), sufficient to uphold you in temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13), sufficient to enable you to perform all his will (1 Thessalonians 5:25). The providence of God will never take you where the grace of God will not keep you. “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it”! His grace is sufficient to uphold, sustain, provide for, and protect his servants and to make their labours effectual to the souls of men. “Our sufficiency is of God”! And his grace is sufficient even for, no, especially for his fallen saints (Psalm 37:23-25; Mark 16:7).

In your last hour, when you come to the swelling of the Jordan and are about to cross over to the other side, you will yet hear him say, “My grace is sufficient for thee”! When the world is on fire, you will look back over this world and all your life’s experiences and say, “He hath done all things well.” In that great day should the Lord Jesus ask, “Lacked ye anything?” Our response will be, “Nothing.”

Oh, how unsearchable are the riches of Christ “in this present time”. And after this, in the world to come “life everlasting”. He gives us grace here, boundless, infinite, free grace, and glory in the world to come!

**A Prophecy**

In (vv. 31-33) we have before us our Saviour’s clear and detailed prophecy concerning his own death as our Substitute. The Lord Jesus, from old eternity, set his face like a flint to go to Calvary and die in our place, bearing our sins in his own body, that he
might suffer all the wrath of God to the full satisfaction of justice, to put away our sins and redeem us from the curse of the law. Now, he says to his disciples, “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets 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.”

It was for this cause that he came into the world (Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 10:5-14). He came here to give his life a ransom for many, to make his soul an offering for sin, and to bear our transgressions in his own body on the tree. He was born in Bethlehem so that he might pour out his life’s blood unto death at Jerusalem.

Let our souls ever be clothed with wonder and amazement before our Saviour and his great love for us (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9, 10). Let us ever glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:14).

He never swerved from his path for a moment. He was straitened in spirit, until he had finished the work he came to do (Luke 12:50). Such love passes knowledge. It is unspeakable and unsearchable! We may rest on that love without fear. If Christ so loved us before we thought of him, he will surely not cease to love us after we have believed.

Our Saviour’s calmness in the prospect of certain death is an example for us. Like him, let us drink the bitter cup which our Father gives us, without a murmur, and say, “not my will but thy will be done”. Believers have no reason to be afraid of death and the grave. Christ died to deliver us from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15; 1 Corinthians 15:56, 57). Because he died, we shall never die. Because he arose, we shall arise. Because he lives, we shall forever live.
A Problem
Here is a very sad, but very common problem among true believers. “And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken” (v. 34).

When the Lord Jesus described his coming sufferings and death, as he often did, his disciples didn’t understand a thing he said. Its significance was hidden from them. They failed to grasp what he was talking about. We read this with a mixture of pity and surprise. We wonder at the darkness and blindness of the Jews. We marvel that in the face of plain teaching, and in the light of plain types of the Mosaic law the sufferings of Christ were not known. But when we read of the ignorance and unbelief of these disciples, these who truly forsook all and followed him, these who truly trusted him, we are amazed. These were saved men, the apostles of our Lord!

What pride, arrogance, and hypocrisy that fact reveals in us. We have greater light than they had. We have the whole volume of holy scripture. We walk no longer, as they did, in the dim light of types, shadows, ceremonies, and carnal ordinances. We have the full sunshine of God’s complete Revelation. Yet, we are still terribly ignorant, fearful, and unbelieving.

Why did God the Holy Spirit inspire Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to tell us so much about the ignorance and unbelief, the weaknesses and fears, the falls and failings, and even the denials and abandonments of these faithful men? He did so to teach us that were he to leave us to ourselves, we would all soon perish. Thank God, he will not leave us to ourselves!

He did so to teach us that our salvation is not dependent upon the strength and quality of our faith, but upon the strength and quality of our Saviour. It is not our knowledge that saves us, but Christ.

And he did so to teach us that Salvation is altogether the work of God’s free grace in Christ. God’s saints in this world, as
long as we live in this world, are still weak, sinful, failing, and ignorant men. Nothing more!

We must, as long as we are in this weak state, live by faith in Christ. “As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him.”

Yet, it is to us, weak, ignorant, sinful believers that the Lord Jesus Christ made the promise we read in verses 29 and 30. “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.”
Chapter 26

“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. And they told him, that Jesus of Nazareth passeth by. And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me. And they which went before rebuked him, that he should hold his peace: but he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me. 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. And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God” (Luke 18:35-43).

Jesus At A Stand

We read in the tenth chapter of Joshua how that he by whom the walls of Jericho fell, commanded the sun to stand still in the midst of heaven. At the command of a man “the sun stood still”! We are told, “There was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man” (Joshua 10:14). But here we have something even more remarkable than that. Here we see the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, at a stand. He was stopped dead in his tracks by the cry of a needy sinner for mercy. It is one thing to cause the sun to stand still; but we
have before us in this passage a man who caused the God who made the sun to stand still!

As he was coming near Jericho on his way to Jerusalem to redeem his people, our Lord Jesus heard a poor, blind beggar crying for mercy. At the sound of his cry, we are told, “Jesus stood”! What a wonderful, amazing picture we have before us! Here is the omnipotent God stopped in his tracks, held fast by the cry of a needy soul for his mercy.

He was on his way to Jerusalem to accomplish the redemption of his people, to fulfil the will of God. Nothing could stop him. Nothing could cause him to pause. Nothing could detour him from his work. But one, solitary, helpless soul, one blind beggar crying for mercy, looking to him for help, believing him, crying to him, stopped the Son of God in his tracks “Jesus stood”!

Surely, the place whereon we stand is holy ground. Let us put off our shoes of idle curiosity and theological speculation, and turn aside for a little while from such trifles to see this great sight. Surely, there are lessons to be learned here that are of more value than gold.

The one thing that shines forth from this event in our Saviour’s earthly life and ministry is this: The Son of God will never ignore the cry or refuse the faith of a sinner seeking mercy, because he “delighteth in mercy”!

**Witnesses Believed**

Here is a man who believed the testimony he heard from other men about the Lord Jesus in a day when few did. He believed the report of men who told what they knew about the Son of God. There were great multitudes who followed the Lord Jesus as he walked along and taught the people. Some followed him for loaves and some for love. Some out of curiosity and some out of conviction. Some for greed and some for grace. But there were few, very few who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.
Many, many saw his miracles yet believed him not. But here is a blind man, a man who never saw any of our Lord’s miracles. He knew the Master only by hearsay, by the testimony of others. Yet, he believed him, and believed him the first time he heard about him!

This man simply heard other men and women talking about the Saviour (vv. 35-38). Blessed gossip is that gossip that is all about Christ! I wonder what this man heard the crowd saying. Perhaps he heard how the Master had healed others, even “as many as had need of healing” (Luke 9:11). Without question, he had heard who this man is. He called the Saviour “Jesus”, the “Son of David”, and owned him as his “Lord”. He acknowledged that Christ is Lord, the One whose prerogative alone it is to give mercy (v. 41). He heard about the Saviour’s many mighty miracles of mercy. And he heard that “Jesus of Nazareth passeth by”. He knew that the Son of God might never pass his way again!

His simple, confident, immediate faith in Christ causes me to blush. I have books of apologetics, an excellent library of theological works, and numerous good biographies of faithful men, and have read them for over forty years. Yet, how little I know of this childlike confidence and faith in Christ! Even among true believers, simple, confident, unhesitating faith is seldom found where we most reasonably expect it (Luke 18:34). The humble, broken, contrite, and needy soul believes God and walks in peace. The learned, well-read theologian is often harassed with doubts and questions.

Means Used
If we hope for mercy, we must avail ourselves of every means of good to our souls. I cannot adequately stress the importance of diligence in using the means God gives us. We are told there was “a certain blind man who sat by the wayside begging”. He sought the place where his pitiful condition was most likely to
attract attention. He did not sit lazily at home, and wait for relief to come to him. He placed himself by the road-side, so that any who could and would help him might see him and give him help. There, sitting by the wayside, he heard that “Jesus of Nazareth passeth by”. Immediately, he began to cry to the Saviour for mercy. “Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me”! Had he not been where he was, when he was, as the Lord Jesus passed that way, he would not have obtained what he needed.

If you care for your soul, if you desire God’s salvation, remember this blind man. Diligently use the means of grace God has afforded you. Make it your business to be found in the place where the Lord Jesus has promised to be present, in his house, where his saints gather to worship him and hear his Word (Matthew 18:20). Make it your business to sit by the wayside, where the Word of God is read and the gospel of Christ is preached, where God’s people assemble together in public worship.

If you expect God to speak to you and give you his grace, if you expect to hear from heaven while you despise the means he has set before you, because you are too lazy to attend his worship, you are crassly presumptuous.

How many there are who get excited about their religious chat rooms on the internet, or the latest bundle of tapes in the mail, or the preacher on television, and use these things as a substitute for worshipping God in his house, supporting a faithful assembly, and serving the cause of Christ. Such activity may soothe the conscience, but it soothes by searing. I know many who run off to every sovereign grace Bible conference possible, and attend the preaching of a visiting preacher whom they highly esteem, who refuse to hear the pastor God has set in their community and devote themselves to the cause of Christ through the gospel church where they are. All such religious hypocrites are like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11. Your religion is
nothing but a deceitful game that will soon carry you to hell.

It is true that “God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy.” But it is no less true that he ordinarily has mercy on those who use the means he puts before them. I know very few people who were converted outside the house of God. It is true that Christ is found of those who seek him not. But it is also true that he is always found of those who truly seek him (Jeremiah 29:11-14). Those who despise the worship of God and the preaching of the gospel, the fellowship of God’s saints and the praises of his people in Zion despise their own mercies and dig graves for their own souls.

This blind man was in the place where help was most likely to be obtained. I know that God is sovereign. I know that salvation is of the Lord. I know that every chosen, redeemed sinner shall be saved. I am fully aware of those facts and rejoice in them. Yet, I know that every man is responsible for his own soul. I know that we are responsible to use the means of grace God gives us. When this poor, blind man heard that “Jesus of Nazareth passeth by”, he was found “sitting by the wayside”.

What wisdom he displayed! He took up a hopeful position “by the wayside”. There he would be likely to hear any good news that may be spread. There he was most likely to meet with and be seen by the compassionate. Though he was blind, he was not deaf. And he used what he had for good.

Do not forsake the house of God (Hebrews 10:25). Do not forsake the reading of holy scripture (2 Timothy 3:15). Do not forsake private prayer. These are God’s ordained means of grace. To despise them is to despise his grace. To neglect them is to neglect his grace. To use them is to be in the path of mercy (Matthew 18:20).

Blessed Violence
We also have before us a picture of the blessed violence of faith. We learn once more, by the example of this poor blind man, that
as “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence”, so “the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12).

We are told that when this blind man heard that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, he “cried, saying, Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” We are also told that when some rebuked him and told him to hold his peace, he would not be silenced. “But he cried so much the more, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.” He had a felt, desperate need. His need taught him how to pray, and gave him words to speak, and pressed upon him the urgent necessity for help. He was not about to be stopped by the rebukes of people who knew nothing of his misery. Let them think and say what they might, he was determined to have mercy, if the Lord Jesus was willing to give it. His sense of wretchedness made him go on crying. And his importunity was rewarded with grace bestowed. He found what he sought. That very day he received his sight.

Are you a poor, blind sinner, without faith, without Christ, without life? Your need is far greater than this man’s. The blindness of the heart is far more grievous than the blindness of the eye. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, is still passing by (Romans 10:6-13). Cry to him for mercy. Let nothing stop your crying.

Why will you die, when life is to be had freely? Why will you perish under the wrath of God, when he “delighteth in mercy”? Why will you rush headlong to hell, when the Door is open in heaven, and God himself bids you, “Come up hither”? Why will you go on carrying the guilt of sin, when the Lord God is a God who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin? Will you die for thirst, with the Water of Life before you? Will you perish for want of bread, with the Bread of Life on the table? Will you be forever lost? If so, there is but one reason. The Son of God declares it to be this: “Ye will not come to me that ye might have life”! Oh, may God be pleased to save you from yourself, for Christ’s sake!
Christ’s Compassion

We see here how compassionate our all-glorious, ever-gracious Christ, the Son of God, is to needy sinners! His compassion is seen in what he did for the man. First, he caused the man to have a need that would put him in this place when he passed by. His blindness was a blessed blindness. It was blindness that worked by Divine arrangement for his eternal salvation. Second, the Saviour sent someone to tell this man about him. Third, he passed by where the man was.

“And Jesus stood” (vv. 40-42). He came to where the man was, heard his cry, and stood as if to say, “I will wait here to be gracious. I will not make another move until I have bestowed mercy upon this needy soul.” He called the blind man. The Saviour commanded that he be brought to him (Psalm 110:3). He spoke grace to him, effectual, omnipotent, healing grace! “Immediately, he received his sight.”

He was honoured by this man’s faith, and he honoured faith with his salvation. “Thy faith hath saved thee”! Then he went up to Jerusalem and redeemed him.

We are told that when the blind man continued crying for mercy, our Lord stood and commanded him to be brought unto him. He was going up to Jerusalem to die, and had weighty matters on his mind; but he found time to stop to speak kindly to this poor sufferer. Then Jesus asked the man, “What do you want me to do for you?” “Lord”, he pleaded, “I want to see”! At once, we are told, “Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee.” His faith may have been weak and mixed with much ignorance. But it had made him cry to the Lord Jesus, and go on crying in spite of rebukes, until the Master answered him. Christ came to him on purpose with grace. He came to Christ on purpose with faith. And the Lord Jesus did not cast him out. He gave him the desire of his heart. Immediately he received sight.
Passages like these are intended specifically to encourage needy sinners to come to Christ. You may be sensible of much infirmity. Your faith may be very feeble. Your sins may be very many and very great. Your prayers may be very poor and stammering. Your motives may be far short of perfection. But if you come to Christ with your sins, if you are willing to forsake all other confidence, and commit your soul to the Christ of God, his word to you is this. “All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). I want you to see and be assured of this fact. Faith always gets what it seeks. Mercy! “And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.”

**Loving Obedience**

Now, let me show you one more thing. Read verse 43, and learn this. Nothing inspires obedience to Christ like gratitude and love. “And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God: and all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God.”

When the blind man was given his sight, when he was saved by Christ, he followed the Lord Jesus, glorifying God. His gratitude was deeply felt. His love was spontaneous. And his following of Christ was spontaneous. Pharisees cavilled at our Lord. Sadducees sneered at his doctrine. Brilliant lawyers derided him as a base antinomian. None of that mattered to this new born soul. He had the witness in himself that Christ is a Master worth following. He could say, “I was blind, and now I see” (John 9:25). He was a poor, blind, lost, dead sinner when he left home that morning. He went home saved, rich, full of light, a child of God. Nothing else mattered.

Grace experienced is the source of true obedience. Gratitude is the source of godliness. Love is the rule of devotion. No one will ever take up the cross and confess Christ, not really, who does not feel in the depths of his soul that he is head over heels a
debtor to his magnificent, matchless mercy and sovereign, saving grace. We love him who first loved us and washed away our sins with his own precious blood. Christ has redeemed me. He has healed me. He has saved me. I belong to him. What could be more reasonable?

May God be pleased, for Christ’s sake, to give us grace that we may like this man follow the Lord Jesus, glorifying God all the days of our lives.
Chapter 27

“And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, 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. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:1-10).

A Lost Sinner Sought And Saved

It is always profitable for our souls to read about the conversion of a sinner by God’s omnipotent grace. It is especially profitable to read and study the stories of God’s converting grace given to us in the pages of holy scripture. We should read them often and study them with care, asking God the Holy Spirit to teach us the wonders of his grace. When we read about the conversion of the
Samaritan woman in John 4, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9, and the conversion of Onesimus in the Book of Philemon, we find our hearts saying, “That is what the Lord has done for me.” Don’t we?

In Luke 19:1-10 we read the story of Zacchaeus’ conversion by the Lord Jesus. The key to understanding this story of God’s marvellous, free, saving grace is found in verses 9 and 10. Our Saviour tells us that salvation came to Zacchaeus because “he also is a son of Abraham”. He was saved by omnipotent grace because the Lord Jesus came down here “to seek and to save that which was lost”. And our blessed Saviour never changes. What he did for Zacchaeus, he still does for sinners today.

**Context**

As we read this story, we should read it in its context. Look back to Luke 18. In verses 18-25 we read about the rich young ruler, who refused to bow to Christ. As he walked away from the Master, we read in verses 24-26: “And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 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.” In verse 26 the disciples asked, “Who then can be saved?”

Then, our Saviour said in verse 27, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” Beginning right there, he proceeds to demonstrate the fact that he is that God with whom alone salvation is possible. He and he alone is able to save unto the uttermost all who come to God by him, for he is himself God the Son, God who came to seek and to save that which was lost. In verse 30 he tells us that the salvation he brings is “in the world to come life everlasting”. In verses 31-33 he tells us how this salvation, this life everlasting comes to our poor souls by his death upon the cursed tree as the sinner’s Substitute. In verses 35-43, giving sight and salvation to the
blind man as he approached Jericho, he shows us that the sure result of his finished work of redemption is the salvation of sinners by omnipotent grace.

**Solemn Words**

This chapter opens with some very solemn words given by God the Holy Spirit, words we must not pass over lightly. “And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.” The Lord Jesus entered into Jericho, and passed through it. As he was approaching Jericho, he saved Bartimaeus (Mark 10:40-52) and the bind man we read about in chapter 18. As he was going out of Jericho, he saved two blind men sitting by the wayside (Matthew 20:29-34). A short distance further out of Jericho, he saved Zacchaeus.

But we read of no wonders of grace performed in Jericho. Rather, here we read, “And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.” Back in the days of Joshua, hundreds of years before, the Lord Jesus found a precious jewel for his crown there in a harlot named Rahab (Joshua 2 and 6; Hebrews 11:31). Indeed, he found many jewels for his crown there over the years (1 Kings 16:34). But now he passes through Jericho. It appears that there were none within the walls of that great city he had come to save. Now he finds jewels for his crown among the poor, the blind, the publicans, and sinners, who were the castaways of Jericho.

With these words in verse 1, Luke seems to be saying to us, “Never cease to adore and give thanks to God our Saviour for his sovereign, distinguishing grace”! He who has mercy on whom he will have mercy, has not left us to ourselves! Let us rejoice and worship him (Psalm 116:12, 13, 17).

The spiritual lessons in this passage (Luke 19:1-10) are many. Let me direct your attention to just a few of them.

**Grace Omnipotent**

First, Zacchaeus’ conversion tells us that the grace of God that
brings salvation is omnipotent and irresistible. None are too sinful, too base, too vile, or too far gone for Christ to save. His arm is not shortened that he cannot save. Oh, no! His mighty arm is omnipotent in the operations of his grace! None are beyond the reach of omnipotent mercy!

Here is a notorious publican, one of the most well known of the despised tax-collectors dwelling near Jericho, transformed into a child of God. Here is a rich man made to pass through the needle’s eye into the kingdom of God. Here is a covetous man transformed instantaneously into a self-sacrificing philanthropist! Our all-glorious, ever-gracious Christ is able to save to the uttermost! Here is a Physician before whom none are incurable! Yes, “all things are possible with God” and Jesus Christ is God our Saviour! He still breaks the power of cancelled sin and sets the captive free. He still makes the lame to walk again and causes the blind to see!

Hear him, ye deaf! His praise, ye dumb!
Your loosened tongues employ!
Ye blind behold your Saviour come;
And leap ye lame for joy!

Small Things
The second thing I see in this story of Zacchaeus’ conversion is the fact that our great God uses even the smallest, most insignificant things to save his own elect. Great works often turn on small things. Let us despise none (Zechariah 4:10).

And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature (Luke 19:2, 3).

It was curiosity, nothing but curiosity on his part that brought Zacchaeus to the place ordained of God from eternity to
be the place where Christ would find him. His curiosity and that
alone seems to have inspired him, a grown man, to scamper up a
sycamore tree like a little boy (v. 4). But …

    God moves in a mysterious way
    His wonders to perform!

    Zacchaeus was curious; but Christ had come to be gracious.
It was Christ who was secretly working to accomplish his
purpose of grace toward Zacchaeus. His curiosity was but a part
of our Lord’s secret work by which he would perform his
gracious work.

**Sovereign Election**
Here is a third thing made clear in this passage. Salvation comes
to chosen sinners because the purpose of God according to
election is sure. As I told you before, Salvation came to
Zacchaeus because Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham.
He may or may not have been a Jew outwardly. We are not
told. Many of the publicans were Jews. Others were Gentiles.
But this publican was a child of promise (Galatians 4:28), one of
Christ’s, an heir of promise, because he was numbered among
Abraham’s spiritual seed (Galatians 3:29). He was by nature a
coarse, wicked man (Matthew 18:17). Like you and me, he was
a sinner by birth, a sinner by nature, a sinner by choice, and a
sinner by practice. But he was distinguished from all others in
the crowd that day by God’s distinguishing grace and called,
because God had from the beginning chosen him to salvation.

**Prevenient Grace**
Fourth, we have before us in the conversion of Zacchaeus
another display of God’s marvellous prevenient grace. Yes,
Zacchaeus sought to see Jesus, who he was. He was curious to
see the man about whom so much commotion was made. But Zacchaeus was not the one who caused the commotion or the curiosity it aroused. That was Christ himself. He sought to see Zacchaeus long before Zacchaeus thought about seeking to see him. Our Saviour purposefully directed his steps through Jericho, because the hour had come for him to call Zacchaeus. This was the day appointed from all eternity for salvation to come to Zacchaeus’ house! All the steps leading to that purposed end were marked out, over-ruled, and made to serve this one great end.

Oh, how precious is the realization of God’s prevenient grace when it is revealed to us by his Spirit! That which the world cannot see, the Spirit taught soul sees as a huge volume read by his enlightened eyes, telling the story of God’s secret operations of grace just for him. The many wondrous works of God’s prevenient grace performed for us were those things that ultimately brought us to Christ and Christ to us. As Jude puts it, we were sanctified by God the Father, preserved in Jesus Christ, and called. Therefore, mercy, peace, and love have been multiplied to us all the days of our lives, though we knew nothing about it until we were called (Jude 1, 2). Goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our lives, chasing us to the appointed place of love, at the appointed time of love. And that same goodness and mercy will continue to follow us all the days of our lives, until goodness and mercy have chased us right into glory!

Look back, O my soul, look back over the days of your life and see how preserving grace in Christ kept you until that same grace called you to Christ, and all this from the sanctification of God the Father in his eternal purpose concerning you (Ephesians 1:3-6; Romans 8:28-30; 11:33-36).

The sweet hounds of heaven, “Goodness” and “Mercy”, get Zacchaeus treed. Then the Son of God comes to the spot, beholds him who, though he went to see Christ, never once
thought that Christ would see him. There the Lord calls to him, calls him by name, bids him come down, invites himself to his house, tells him that he must today abide with him at his house; and Zacchaeus finds his heart instantly disposed to come down from the tree, and to receive Christ joyfully. Why? Because it is written, “Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple ... Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth” (Psalms 65:4; 110:3).

When poor sinners, like this publican, feel a desire to see Christ, to hear his Word as he passes by, though they may be completely unaware of it, it may be that it is their Saviour working upon their minds creating the desire in them, predisposing them to hear his voice in the call of the gospel. Though they are, like Zacchaeus, “of little stature”, little in knowledge, little in the apprehension of their sins, and even little in desire for Christ, yet, neither the press of the world, the press of time, or the press of a multitude, can keep them from Christ, when the time of love has come.

When, by some event of providence, a sinner is caused to be in the place where Christ comes in saving power, though he may have come with the most base motives imaginable, if the sinner is one of God’s elect and the time of love has come for him, he will then and there hear the Shepherd’s voice and follow him.

Child of God, roll these things over in your heart day by day. Never lose sight of them. The Son of God had his eye upon you from eternity, just as he had his eye upon Zacchaeus. You were chosen by him in everlasting love (Ephesians 1:3, 4). Your name was written in the Book of Life before the worlds were made (Revelation 13:8; Luke 10:20). You were one of those sheep given to the Good Shepherd by the Father from old eternity (John 10:27-29). And it is written, “The flocks shall pass again
under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the Lord” (Jeremiah 33:13). He said, “I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant” (Ezekiel 20:37). And so it came to pass!

Irresistible Grace
Look at verses 5 and 6. Zacchaeus was in this place at this time because the Lord planted that sycamore tree just outside Jericho for him and sent him up that tree, because he was coming there to save him. Because the Lord wanted his conversion to be, as it were, a public spectacle, he made Zacchaeus a little man and the limbs of the tree low enough for him to get hold of them. “And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house” (v. 5).

And you know what, Zacchaeus did. “And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully” (v. 6). He did so because God’s omnipotent, saving grace is irresistible. He who said, “To day I must abide at thy house”, must do so.

If any sinner comes to Christ, and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ unto life everlasting, he does so because God has drawn him to Christ by the effectual power and irresistible grace of his Spirit. True faith is the result of, not the cause of, divine grace. Saving faith is created in a person’s heart by the mighty, sovereign operations of God the Holy Spirit in omnipotent, saving grace (Ephesians 1:19; Colossians 2:12).

This creation of faith in the heart, by which a person is drawn to Christ, is what we call “effectual calling” or “irresistible grace”. The effectual calling of the Holy Spirit is that sovereign, gracious, irresistible work and operation of God the Holy Spirit which changes a man’s heart and will, causing him to come to Christ and be saved.

Effectual calling is the tender influence, overpowering love, compelling grace, and irresistible power of God the Holy Ghost,
which causes chosen, redeemed sinners to gladly and willingly receive Christ as Lord and Saviour. Those who by nature, if left to themselves, would not come to Christ, are made willing to come to him in effectual calling.

A Mighty Change
Read verses 7 and 8, and you will see that grace wrought in a sinner makes a mighty change in the sinner who experiences it.

“And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, 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.

Without any word of command, without any threat of law, without any promise of reward, Zacchaeus did what the rich young ruler, who claimed to live by the law, could never do. He sold everything he had for the Pearl of Great Price, took up his cross, and followed the Saviour joyfully, with a willing heart, because he wanted to. What was the difference between the two men? God’s distinguishing grace! That is all. The Lord Jesus did something for Zacchaeus. The rich young ruler came to Jesus. But here we see Jesus coming to Zacchaeus. What a difference! And that is exactly how the Saviour explains the difference. “And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (vv. 9, 10).

These 10 verses of holy scripture give us the inspired spiritual biography of every one of Christ’s redeemed ones. This is my testimony. And, if you know him, this is your testimony, too.

Our blessed Saviour has from everlasting arranged every step for the accomplishment of his great purpose of grace for his own. When the hour is come for the calling of his chosen to the knowledge and enjoyment of himself and of all God’s
boundless, free grace in him, he brings his own to the appointed place and meets them with omnipotent grace. Everything in providence is so ordered and disposed of by his prevenient grace that not one thing can fail.

How refreshing! How blessed! During all the days and years of our rebellion, sin, and unbelief, the Saviour’s eye unceasingly watched over us. And when the love-calls of his Holy Spirit went forth, though, like Zacchaeus, we were lifted up with Pharisaical pride, self-righteousness, ambition, worldly pursuits, and the countless other vanities that had kept us from Christ, down we came at the call of grace! Gladly, we took the Saviour home to our house and to our heart, and received him joyfully. Why? Because the Son of man came at the time of love to seek and to save that which was lost!

Do you know anything of the love-calls of our omnipotent Saviour? It is impossible not to know them, if you have ever heard them. The soul that hears the voice of the Son of God, though he never heard it before, knows the sweet sound of the Shepherd’s voice. When the Saviour speaks to a sinner dead in trespasses and sins, he speaks with a loud voice that cannot be ignored (John 11:43), a powerful voice that cannot be resisted (John 11:44; Psalm 29:3-11), a still small voice none can hear except the one called (1 Kings 19:9-14), a sweet, loving, winning voice to open the heart (Song of Solomon 5:2), a personal voice that is known by the one called (Luke 19:5).
Chapter 28

“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. 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. 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. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layest not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. 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? 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.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which
would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me” (Luke 19:11-27).

The Nobleman And His Servants

When our Master had saved Zacchaeus, though the disciples heard his doctrine and saw the way he dealt with that poor soul in grace, though the Lord Jesus had told them plainly that he was on his way to Jerusalem to die in their place, to redeem his people by the shedding of his blood, they still thought they were on their way to his inauguration ball as the King of Israel! The parable given in verses 12-27 was given to correct their ignorance, “because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.”

Their minds were fixed on the notion that the coming of Christ the King meant that he was about to become a carnal king, a king over the physical nation of Israel. They had terribly carnal notions about his kingdom. So he here showed 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, earthly kingdom, they would have understood that in the calling of Zacchaeus, the Lord Jesus had manifested his kingship in the realm of mercy and grace and salvation. He had in seeking and saving Zacchaeus displayed the sovereignty of his grace as the sovereign king of grace. That is what he is doing today on his throne as our great King, the Son of God and the Son of man, the Son of David and David’s Lord. He is seeking and saving his lost ones.
This parable is an illustration, a picture of things present and things to come, which ought to set our hearts upon our Saviour and his cause in this world. Its intent is to show us our faithful God and Saviour, who has promised, “him that honoureth me I will honour”, and will reward his faithful servants for their service, not in this world, but in the world to come.

The Nobleman

“He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return” (v. 12). I am sure that you understand who the nobleman in this parable represents. He represents our Lord Jesus himself. He was here on earth a man among men, and truly a nobleman in the midst of his fellow citizens. He was and is King of all the earth. He is King by nature and by right, but he must first go away by death, resurrection, and ascension, to the highest courts of heaven to receive for himself a kingdom from his Father as the reward of his obedience. It is written in the 2nd Psalm, “Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance.” The day is coming when he will return, clothed with glory and honour, to take unto himself his great power and reign; for he must reign till all enemies are put under his feet. When he comes, his enemies will be destroyed, and his faithful servants will be abundantly rewarded. That is the essence of the parable’s meaning.

The Son of God came here in humiliation as the Son of man “to seek and to save that which was lost.” He is here portrayed as having finished his work of redemption and returned to glory to receive his kingdom. He ascended back to heaven to receive the kingdom for us as our Forerunner (Hebrews 6:20), and to receive all his ransomed ones into his kingdom by the mighty operations of his Holy Spirit. He is still the Son of man, now ascended to glory and seated upon his throne; and it is still his business “to seek and to save that which was lost.” After he has
received his kingdom, after he has saved all his lost ones, he will return to judge the world. Even then, it shall be his business “to seek and to save that which was lost.”

When the Lord Jesus left this world, he ascended up into heaven as a mighty conqueror, leading captivity captive. He is there sitting at the right hand of God, doing the work of a High Priest for his people, ever making intercession for them. But he will not sit there always. He will come forth from the holy of holies to bless his people. He will come again with power and glory to put down every enemy under his feet, and to set up his universal kingdom in a new heavens and a new earth (Hebrews 2:8, 9). When Christ returns, the kingdoms of the world shall become his.

Let these things sink down into our hearts and minds. In all our thoughts about Christ let us never forget his glorious second advent. He who lived for us, and died for us, and rose again for us, and intercedes for us is coming again in power and great glory (Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 3:11-14).

Christ’s Servants

“And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us” (vv. 13, 14). Our Lord compares his servants to men who have been left in charge of their master’s money, with strict instructions to use that money well. They are to occupy until he comes again. To each of these ten servants he gave a pound of money. But who are these servants? Though ten servants are mentioned, there are but two groups, or categories. All ten are the Nobleman’s servants; but some were faithful and good, the others were slothful and useless.

Each servant was given a pound, which appears to me to represent the gospel of the grace of God. Oh, what a choice blessing that is! All who are given the great privilege of hearing
the gospel of the grace of God have the same charge. “Occupy
till I come.” The words mean, “Take this pound that I have put
in your hands and busy yourself in trade with it until I return.”

What does that mean? It means that we to whom the Lord
God has given this great treasure are responsible to trade with it
for the increase of riches to our souls, responsible to believe it to
the saving of our souls. This is exactly what Paul tells us in 2
Corinthians 5:18-6:1.

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to
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 imputing their trespasses unto them; and
hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. 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. For
he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we
might be made the righteousness of God in him. We then, as
workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not
the grace of God in vain.”

It is true that we cannot and will not trade, without money
and without price, for the Pearl of Great Price until and unless
God the Holy Spirit gives us grace to do so. But that is our
charge, our responsibility before God. Taking the pound the
Lord has given us, believing the gospel, our souls are enriched
with grace, enriched with the sweet experience of grace, some
fivefold and some tenfold. And in the world to come we shall be
enriched by his grace to an infinitely higher degree than can ever
be imagined by us in this body of flesh (1 Corinthians 2:9, 10).

The countless privileges which we enjoy, compared to those
who have never heard the gospel, are “pounds” given to us by
Christ, “pounds” for which we must one day give account. In the
Judgment Day we will not stand side by side with the tribesmen
of heathen lands who never heard of the Bible, the God of
Glory, and the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ. We have much
more for which we shall give account in that great day.

The faithful servants in this parable represent those who believe the gospel, using the means God has given us for the benefit of our souls. These faithful servants rejoice in the prospect of the Lord’s coming. By the grace of God, we shall be found looking for him when he comes again, living in hope of eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

The unprofitable servant has his pound. He, too, hears the gospel of grace and salvation, redemption and righteousness in and by Christ. But the unprofitable servant hates his Master, the Lord Jesus. He hates God’s method of saving sinners by free and sovereign grace through Christ, the sinner’s crucified Substitute, and rejects the counsel of God against his own soul.

Both the faithful servants and the unprofitable servant differ from the world in general. They differ in this one thing. You and I have been given the gospel. We have been called by the gospel. The world at large has not. To whom much is given, much shall be required. What a great benefit! What a great weight of responsibility!

The unbelief and rejection of the unprofitable servant is the cause of his just condemnation (Proverbs 1:23-33). The faith of the profitable servant, believing the gospel, trusting Christ, magnifies the riches of God’s free grace in us and assures us of greater riches in the world to come.

**Blessed Servitude**

All ten of these servants were the nobleman’s servants, both the faithful and the unprofitable. Believers and unbelievers alike are Christ’s servants. Those who hate him and refuse to bow to him are his servants, just as surely as Gabriel himself. And we who believe him and rejoice in his rule are his servants. Yet all are his servants. But only we who believe him, who are glad to be his servants are “occupying”, using the gospel for our souls’ everlasting benefit.
Let me show you something about the blessedness of our service. It is a blessed servitude indeed! Our service is most honourable. We serve a great Nobleman, the King of Glory! Ours is a service for which our Master supplies all “a pound”. All that we need to know Christ and enrich our souls by Christ is found in the gospel. And our service is itself exactly that which we need. Faith in Christ. The essence of our service is faith in Christ, worshipping the Son of God (John 6:27-29). What blessed service this is! To occupy till he comes, to make trade with the gospel, is neither more nor less than believing him. The more we believe him, the more our souls are enriched by him. The more we believe him, the more we grow in the grace and knowledge of God our Saviour.

Reckoning Day
There is a day coming in which we will give an account of our service. In that great day of reckoning we will be judged by the gospel, by what we have done with the “pound” our Saviour has given 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. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds” (vv. 15, 16).

The faithful servant, with proper humility, puts himself in the background. It is not he who has “gained ten pounds”, but 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.”

“And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also
over five cities” (vv. 17-19).

Notice that there is no correlation between the servant’s work and the reward for it. He who gained ten pounds in this world by the faith God gave him by the gospel, and he who gained but two, are each declared to be faithful servants and rewarded as such.

“And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: 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. 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?” (vv. 20-23).

The Servants Rewarded

“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.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me” (vv. 24-27).

Those who will not have this Man to rule over them, those who are his enemies, when he comes again, he will take from them everything they have and give it to his own. Then, he will have them brought before him and slain.

Do you remember our Lord’s answer to Peter, when Peter asked him what we shall have who have left all and followed him (Luke 18:28-30)? The Lord Jesus said, “In the world to come life everlasting”! That is the reward the Lord Jesus gives to all who trust him. He says, “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” (Matthew 25:21).

God’s saints receive great recompense even in this present time. Though our names are often cast out as evil, though we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God, the gain of godliness, of faith in Christ, is not to be measured in earthly things, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, in a good hope through grace and joy in believing. Still, our good things are not in this world. But there is a day coming when we shall have an abundant recompense! We shall, in that day, receive wages far exceeding anything we have imagined. “In the world to come life everlasting”!

We read of a place that’s called heaven.
It’s made for the pure and the free.
These truths in God’s Word he hath given.
How beautiful heaven must be!

In heaven no drooping nor pining,
No wishing for elsewhere to be.
God’s light is forever there shining
How beautiful heaven must be!

Pure waters of life there are flowing;
And all who will drink may be free.
Rare jewels of splendour are glowing
How beautiful heaven must be!

The angels so sweetly are singing
Up there by the beautiful sea.
Sweet chords from their gold harps are ringing.
How beautiful heaven must be!

How beautiful heaven must be!
Sweet home of the happy and free,
Fair haven of rest for the weary,
How beautiful heaven must be!
Chapter 29

“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. 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. And they brought him to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon. 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. 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” (Luke 19:28-40).

King Jesus Riding The Wild Ass’s Colt
I love the way Luke tells us that the Lord Jesus “went before” (v. 28) his disciples. Don’t you? In all things he goes before us, leading the way. He never sends where he has not been and does not lead. If he leads you down a winding road into a deep, dark valley, he goes before you. If he leads you into the wilderness of temptation, he goes before you. And when he brings you up to heaven, “ascending up to Jerusalem” above, he has gone before you, to prepare a place for you.

Here Luke tells us that the Saviour is “ascending”, purposefully, confidently, determinately “up to Jerusalem” as our great King, ascending to conquer death, hell, and the grave for us, ascending to his throne in Glory as our King. This event in the earthly life and ministry of our Saviour is one of just a few that are recorded in detail by Matthew (21:1-11), Mark (11:1-11), Luke, and John (12:12-19). It is the only event in our Saviour’s earthly life and ministry that he seems to have deliberately made a matter of great, public display. Surely, that which is here revealed is a matter of great importance. We ought to read these passages with great care, asking the Spirit of God to teach us the lessons for which he inspired all four of the gospel writers to record them.

The Obvious
Several things recorded here are obvious facts, facts so obvious that the only way they can be missed is by the wilful, deliberate rejection of the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of the living God.

The Bible is, indeed, the Word of God. Matthew tells us that all this was done that the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 might be fulfilled. “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.” Because that was written in the
Book of Zechariah, Luke writes, “And it came to pass”.

Our great Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the omniscient, all-knowing God. He told his disciples exactly where they would find the ass and her colt and exactly what would happen when they found them.

Our Redeemer is the sovereign Lord and King of all the universe. He did not come to Jerusalem to be made a king. He came into Jerusalem triumphantly as the King. He was going, by way of the cross, to receive his kingdom. But he was King already. The ass and her colt belonged to him; and the men who owned them belonged to him. All were his servants. All did his bidding.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is, always was, and always shall be king over everybody and everything, by virtue of the fact that he is God. The one true and living God is king everywhere. He always has his way and does his will. Here we see the Lord Jesus ascending up to Jerusalem as our Mediatorial King to take possession of his kingdom, the kingdom and dominion given to him as the God-man by his Father, as the reward of his obedience to God as our Mediator (Romans 14:9; John 17:2; Philippians 2:9-11). Therefore, we read in verses 36-38 that “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.”

An Allegory
But there is more to be learned from this historic narrative of our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem than these facts. There are spiritual lessons in the story that tell us again how it is that God our Saviour saves his elect. As the Holy Spirit tells us in Galatians 4 that the story of Sarah and Hagar is an allegory, this
too is an allegory. It is a true, historical event; but it is more. It is an event that portrays God’s free, sovereign, saving grace in and by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We commonly look upon the events of the Old Testament as things designed and intended by our God to be pictures of grace. But, in reading the New Testament, for some strange reason, we tend to overlook the spiritual lessons contained in the historical events. That ought never to be the case.

We must never spiritualize holy scripture. I mean by that statement that we must never twist the scriptures into whatever it is we want them to teach. To do so is to treat the Word of God with horrible irreverence. Yet, when we read the Word of God, we are always to look for the spiritual meaning, the gospel message, each particular passage is intended to convey, knowing that every event in the earthly life of our Saviour and every miracle performed by him is written in the Book of God to give us a picture, an object lesson about his great salvation.

When we read the Book of God in this way, it comes to life. Several years ago, when he was just four years old, my grandson, Will, pointing to my Bible on my desk, asked, “Poppy, is this where Jesus lives?” Though I gave him a much more thorough answer, explaining what I could of the person and work of our blessed Saviour, in a very real sense the answer to his question is, “Yes, the Lord Jesus lives right here in this blessed Book.” Every word he spoke, every movement he made, every step he took was predetermined before the world began for the salvation of his elect and was designed by God’s eternal decree to show us something of God’s sovereign, electing, redeeming, saving, mercy, love, and grace through Christ our Redeemer. Even the small details, those things that appear to be no more than records with information show forth his great salvation.

Here, in Luke 19, we have such a record. Perhaps you have never before read the story as you are about to read it. If that is
the case, I promise you that when I am done you will never read it the same again. This story of our Lord Jesus riding the wild ass’s colt through the streets of Jerusalem is really the old, old story of his sovereign, electing, fetching, irresistible, saving grace.

**Proof**

We must not give such a meaning to the story without clear evidence from holy scripture that this is the reason why the story was written. This may, or may not, have been the reason Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John had in mind as they recorded the story; but it is the reason God the Holy Spirit inspired them to write it down in the very words we have in the gospel narratives. Let me show you two texts from the Old Testament to demonstrate this.

First, look again at the prophecy of Zechariah (Zechariah 9:9, 10).

“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. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.”

The prophet Zechariah shows us here that when Christ rode into Jerusalem, his triumphal entry was made in the way it was made to display the character of his kingdom and his work as our King. He came riding “an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass”, to show himself in the infinite humility of his grace as One who is “just and having salvation”. He comes to break the bow of war and “speak peace unto the heathen”, and to do so in universal dominion “from sea to sea, even to the ends of the earth”.
In Job 11:12 we will see who the wild ass’s colt is, upon whom the King of Glory rides through the streets of Jerusalem in triumphant grace. There we are told that “vain man” is “born like a wild ass’s colt”. The ass’s colt upon which our Saviour rode through Jerusalem is in scripture a picture of fallen man.

Disciples Sent
“He sent two of his disciples” (v. 29). Wherever God has someone to save and whenever the appointed time comes for him to save them, he sends a preacher (Romans 10:13-17). No man can believe the gospel until someone preaches the gospel to him. Notice that these two disciples were sent by the Master. No prophet or preacher in the scriptures ever applied for the job! God’s preachers are chosen, called, gifted, and sent by him.

These two disciples were sent on a very specific errand. They were sent to fetch something for the Lord Jesus. God sends his servants to fetch his elect to himself, as David sent Ziba to fetch Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9). How I thank God that in the appointed time of love, he sent one of his servants to fetch me! Don’t you?

An Assurance
When our Lord sent these disciples on their mission, he assured them that they would find what he sent them to get, “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” (v. 30).

Men often raise this argument against the teaching of holy scripture with regard to God’s sovereignty. “If election is true, if some are predestinated to be saved, and their salvation is sure, why preach?” What a foolish question! We preach the gospel to all men because our God and Saviour has sent us to do so. He says, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” We preach the gospel because “it pleased God by the
foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” And we preach the gospel with confidence because he has told us plainly and assured us that those to whom and for whom we are sent shall be saved. “All that the Father hath given Me shall come to Me.” “Other sheep I have ... Them also I must bring.” All Christ’s sheep shall be found. Each of his elect shall be called and shall come (Isaiah 55:11; 2 Corinthians 2:14-16). And God’s elect will be found exactly where he puts them in his wise and good providence. There were many wells in Samaria; but that chosen woman to whom Christ came was found at a certain well. There were many trees along the Jericho Road; but Zacchaeus was found up a certain tree.

What an encouragement to preach the gospel. “Ye shall find”! There are no accidents in God’s world. The sovereign Lord puts his lost sheep exactly where he wants them. And he ties his wild ass’s colts exactly where he wants them tied.

An Ass’s Colt
Our Lord Jesus told these two disciples exactly what they were looking for in verse 31. He sent them to find “a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat”, or as we saw in Job 11, “a wild ass’s colt”. Mark 11:4 tells us where they found this colt. “And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met.” He sent them to find a colt tied outside in a place where two ways met. This was not the colt of a fine Kentucky Thoroughbred, or a Tennessee Walker, or even the colt of a Quarter Horse. This colt was the foal of an ass, a wild ass’s colt, “whereon yet never man sat” (Matthew 2; Zechariah 9:9).

What a good, accurate description and picture this is of every stubborn, unbroken, untamed, wild sinner. God’s Word is very plain in describing mankind in very clear terms, with very obvious meanings. And you will find that, unlike the preachers of this day, God never has anything good to say about fallen
man. God describes our race as fallen, altogether filthy and incapable of doing good (Psalm 14). From the soles of our feet to the crown of our heads there is no soundness in us, nothing but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores (Isaiah 1). In Romans 3 we are described as being totally unprofitable and useless.

And the pictures of fallen men are even more debasing than the words used to describe us. Like Lazarus, we are dead and stinking. Like the aborted infant described by Ezekiel, we are polluted in our own blood.

But here in Luke, and no less than eight times in the Word of God, we are represented, and very accurately represented, as wild ass’s colts. That is how we are described in Job 11:12. You and I are all born by nature “like a wild ass’s colt”, foolish, senseless, and stubborn, given to lust and debauchery. As the wild ass will not bear the yoke, so none will ever bow to the yoke of Christ, except the Son of God break him. Man by nature is like “a wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up wind at her pleasure” (Jeremiah 2:24; Job 39:5).

In the movies you see old men and women riding donkeys, and get the idea that they are nice, gentle, sweet animals, the kind you would like to have for pets, if you just had the room. But that is never the case by nature. It is their nature to be mean. If you try to get one to ride, to carry a load, to pull a cart, unless and until he is broken and tamed, he will buck, and kick, and bite. If all else fails, he will just sit down.

That’s a pretty good picture of man. Made by God and made for his glory, all men ought to gladly give thanks to him, submit to his rule, worship him, and give him his due. But just try to get one to worship God, and watch him kick. Tell those sweet, religious wild ass’s the truth about man, about God, about Christ, about redemption and grace, and watch them buck and bite! Yes, man is well described and represented as a “wild ass’s colt”.
Colt Tied
Did you notice that this colt was tied (v. 30)? People love to think they are independent and free. Don’t they? But the fact is, every man by nature is tied and bound; by sin, by Satan, by tradition, by peer pressure, and by religion.

The colt was tied in a place where two ways met, at a crossroad. So it is with all men. All are bound and tied at a crossroad, at a place where two ways meet: the way to heaven and the way to hell, the way of grace and the way of works, the way of life and the way of death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Fallen man is tied, like this “wild ass’s colt”, outside the door, not in the Door, outside of grace, outside of Christ, not in Christ.

Loose Him
The Lord Jesus sent his two disciples to loose this “wild ass’s colt”.

“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” (vv. 30, 31).

Everywhere in the Book of God the grace of God is set before us as that which looses men. Religion binds. Grace looses! We are in the loosing business. These disciples found the wild ass’s colt, just like the Master said they would. When they did, they loosed the ass’s colt. They were told to loose him “because the Lord hath need of him”.

Imagine that! What possible need could the Son of God have for a wild ass’s colt, like you or me? He needs everyone he fetches to himself so that he may see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied, so that he may ride him triumphantly through the streets of Jerusalem and garner the praises of his people for his great goodness as the king of grace and glory!
“And they brought him to Jesus” (v. 35). In John 12:12-15 the Spirit of God sheds more light on this. We have seen that these disciples found the ass’s colt and brought him to the Saviour, and they did. But in John’s narrative the Holy Spirit tells us that it was Christ himself that did the finding.

“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. And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass’s colt.”

It is Christ himself who comes seeking and finding his people, it is Christ himself who fetches sinners by his omnipotent grace to himself through the preaching of the gospel.

And Then …

What happened when they brought this wild ass’s colt to the Saviour? “They cast their garments upon the colt” (v. 35). Not only is it true that all who come to Christ are washed in his blood and robed in his righteousness, clothed with the garments of salvation, they find among his saints a people who receive them and love them, and willingly give them the shirts off their backs.

Then, they sat the Master on the colt, spread their clothes in the way, and watched him ride in triumphant glory through Jerusalem, as “they began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen.” Not the works they had done, but the works they had seen! “Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.”

Here is a wild ass’s colt, broken by grace and ridden by the Son of God, and he doesn’t buck, or kick, or bite. He found the Saviour’s yoke easy and his burden light.
The religious crowd saw what was going on, heard the shouts of praise to God, and the pronounced blessedness of Christ the King, but they did not have a clue what was happening (vv. 39, 40).

**Why?**

Why an ass’s colt? Why not a great white stallion? 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 gives us the answer.

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 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, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

I once read that one of the rarest mammals in world is the African Wild Ass. There are not more than a few hundred in the world. I am not really very interested in that. But I am interested in the people represented in our text by the wild ass’s colt. And I assure you that they are very, very rare.

To understand these things aright,
This grand distinction should be known:
Though all are sinners in God’s sight,
There are but few so in their own.
To such as these our Lord was sent;
They’re only sinners who repent.

What comfort can a Saviour bring
To those who never felt their woe?
A sinner is a sacred thing;
The Holy Ghost hath made him so.
New life from him we must receive,
Before for sin we rightly grieve.

This faithful saying let us own,
Well worthy ’tis to be believed,
That Christ into the world came down,
That sinners might by him be saved.
Sinners are high in his esteem,
And sinners highly value him.

Joseph Hart
Chapter 30

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, 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” (Luke 19:41-44).

“He Beheld The City And Wept”

Among the ancient pagans, there were numerous weeping gods. The dismembered moon goddess of the ancient Mexicans is portrayed as having tears of gold flowing from her eyes. In Joseph Smith’s Book of Mormon, he relates his fabrication of a time when Enoch saw God weeping, tears that fell as rain upon the mountains. (Mr Smith must have smoked one too many peace pipes with the Western Indians!)

Of course, we have no regard for pagan idols and the religious myths built around them. But there are three specific passages of holy scripture that portray God our Saviour weeping tears more precious than gold. In these three texts of scripture we see the incarnate God, our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ in tears. Surely, there are things to be observed in the tender heart of our Saviour, both to instruct and comfort us, as we see him
weeping.

**John 11:35**

In John 11 we see a wondrous thing. You know the context. Lazarus, a man the Saviour loved, has died. The Lord Jesus has come to raise him from the dead. Lazarus’ sisters, Martha and Mary, were broken-hearted and weeping. In the company of his bereaved friends at the tomb of Lazarus, we see the Son of God weeping and groaning in himself (John 11:32-38).

“Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. 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. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.”

“Jesus wept.” That 35th verse is the smallest verse in the entire Bible. Yet, in some respects, it is the largest. Here is our incarnate God weeping with his weeping people. What can this mean? Why has God the Holy Spirit caused these words to be written? What do they teach us?

They teach us that the Lord Jesus Christ, our blessed God and Saviour, is a real man, a man touched with the feeling of our infirmities. His love for Lazarus was great. When they saw him weeping, “Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him”! Oh, how the Son of God loves us!

Though we sorrow not as others who have no hope, God’s people feel pain and sorrow just like other people do. Sorrow does not necessarily imply rebellion against the will of God, or unbelief. The most fragrant flowers are found growing in the
soil of sorrow. Were there no tears in our eyes, there could be no rainbow in our souls.

If our God and Saviour is so tender and sympathetic that the sorrows of his friends caused him to weep, how much more we ought to weep with those who weep, and mourn with those who mourn!

**Hebrews 5:7, 8**

This next passage describes our Saviour in the days of his flesh.

“Our 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; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.”

I have no doubt that this passage has specific reference to our Saviour’s agony of heart and soul in Gethsemane (Mark 14:34-36). In his time of great heaviness, sorrow, and distress, we find our Lord Jesus in prayer. What an example he sets before us. The first one to whom we should turn in every time of trouble is our heavenly Father. Our God should be the first to hear the words of our complaints. He may or may not relieve our trouble; but it is good for our souls for us to unburden our hearts at the throne of grace. There, and only there will we discover the all-sufficiency of his grace (Hebrews 4:16; James 5:13).

What was the cause of our Lord’s great heaviness and sorrow in Gethsemane? What was it that crushed our Master’s heart? What so greatly disturbed him? It certainly was not the fear of physical pain or the fear of dying. It was not even the fear of dying upon the cross. Our great Saviour came into this world in our flesh that he might die as our Substitute at Calvary.

That which crushed our Saviour’s heart was the anticipation of being made sin for us. The heavy, heavy burden which crushed his very soul was the enormous load of sin and guilt, the sin and guilt of all God’s elect which was about to be his.
Our Saviour’s great sorrow was caused by his anticipation of being made sin for us. “It was”, wrote J. C. Ryle, “a sense of the unutterable weight of our sins and transgressions which were then specially laid upon him.” He who knew no sin was about to be made sin for us. He who is the only man who really knows what sin is, the only man who sees sin as God sees it was about to become sin. He who is the holy, harmless, undefiled Lamb of God was about to be made a curse for us. The holy Son of God was about to be forsaken by his Father.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, “began to be sore amazed”, to be in great consternation and astonishment at the sight of all the sins of his people coming upon him; at the black storm of wrath that was gathering thick over him; at the sword of justice which was brandished against him; and at the curses of the righteous law, which, like thunderbolts of vengeance from heaven, were directed at him. No wonder the verse closes by telling us that, in consideration of these things, our Saviour began “to be very heavy”! That which crushed our Saviour’s very heart and soul was the very thing for which he came into the world. It was the anticipation of all that he must endure as our Substitute.

The message of holy scripture is Substitution. The Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, our Mediator and Surety died in our place; in the place of God’s elect, as our Substitute. By his own blood, when he was made sin for us, when he was slain in our stead, he satisfied the justice of God for us, magnified his holy law, made it honourable, and purchased for us the complete, everlasting forgiveness of all our sins. He died, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Christ died at Calvary so that God might be both just and the Justifier of all who believe. It is written, “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged” (Proverbs 16:6; Romans 3:19-28; Ephesians 1:7).

Since the Lord Jesus Christ died as the sinners’ Substitute, since he has met and fully satisfied the justice of God for us,
believing sinners have no reason ever to fear condemnation by God, accusation before God, or separation from God (Romans 8:1-4, 31-39). Since Christ died for me, I cannot die. If you are in Christ, for you there is no possibility of condemnation by him, accusation before him, or separation from him.

It was the enormous load of our sin and guilt which crushed our Saviour’s heart in Gethsemane (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Th’ enormous load of all my guilt
Was on my Saviour laid,
When he, who knew and did no sin,
For sinners, sin was made!

“Awake, O sword”, in furious wrath,
Jehovah cried; and he,
(The Lamb of God, my Substitute!),
Was sacrificed for me!

In that same way, by grace and truth,
My ransomed soul is made
“The righteousness of God in him”,
And I from sin am freed!

This wondrous mystery of grace!
Salvation, full and free,
Shall be the subject of my songs
Throughout eternity!

Luke 19:41-44
Here in Luke 19:41-44, we see the Lord Jesus weeping over the city of Jerusalem.

“And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, 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.

Behold the Man Christ Jesus: tender, merciful, gracious, and compassionate! Behold your God, full of compassion! “He is gracious, full of compassion” (Psalms 112:4; 78:38, 39; 111:4; 145:8, 9).

Here we see the great tenderness and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ toward sinners. When he came near Jerusalem for the last time, “he beheld the city and wept over it.” He knew the character of the people who lived in Jerusalem. Their cruelty, their self-righteousness, their stubbornness, their obstinate prejudice against the gospel, their pride of heart were all things open to him. He knew that they were plotting to murder him, and that in just a few days their hands would drip with his blood. Yet, he beheld the city and wept.

Why did he weep over the lost and ruined city? His own words in these four verses give us three distinct reasons for his great pity.

The Lord Jesus wept for his countrymen because they were ignorant of the gospel (v. 42).

He wept for them because he knew the judgment that was coming upon them (v. 43).

And he wept over the city because he knew that the judgment they suffered was the result of them despising the time of their visitation (v. 44; Proverbs 1:23-33; 29:1; Romans 9:1-3, 31-33; 10:1-4).
Chapter 31

“And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. 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” (Luke 19:45-48).

Purging The House Of God

What if the Son of God were to come to church next Sunday? Have you ever tried to imagine what would happen if the Lord Jesus were to visit one of our modern churches, if he were to attend one of those things people call “worship services” held in his name? What would our Saviour do, if he were to walk into one of our modern church buildings? If the Son of God were to come into most any church in this day, he would do exactly what he did in the passage before us.

Mark tells us that, after he had driven out those who sold doves, and dumped the money-changers’ money in the floor, turning their tables upside-down, he would not allow them to even carry their vessels through the temple. We would be shocked to see the things Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us our Saviour did in the house of God that evening. But, really, we should be shocked that it is not done. This was not some gentle thing that our Saviour did, after he had persuaded the people it
really ought to be done. It was something our Master did in utter fury. John gives a vivid account of a similar event that had taken place three years earlier (John 2:13-17).

“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.”

When our Saviour first began his public ministry, the first time he went with his disciples to keep the passover, he saw in the house of God an unbearable display of irreverence and utter contempt among people who convinced themselves that they were serving the Lord. Now, three years later, he came to Jerusalem again. Again, it was the time of the Jews’ passover. And things were exactly as they had been before.

The Offence
What was the great offence here? What were these people doing that was so bad? The business carried on in the forecourt was connected to the sacrificial offerings and the atonement money required by the law. The Jews came to Jerusalem at the time of passover from many different countries (John 12:20; Acts 2:5). The money-changers were there for what appears to be a very good reason. If they were not there, the people would have to go to a little, needless trouble to get their currency exchanged somewhere else, so that they could pay their required half-shekel.

The same thing could be said for the other businessmen who were there “serving the Lord and his people”. If the people were to keep the passover, they needed sacrifices: animals, wine, oil,
salt, and so forth. The poor, who could not afford larger sacrifices, were permitted by the law to bring a pair of doves. Those who sold doves simply made things easy and convenient. Of course, they had to make a profit.

What could be wrong with these things? We read of nothing in any of the narratives that these people did except that which appeared useful. Their crime was that the priests and the people sought to enrich themselves in the name of serving God. Does that seem familiar? It should. The biggest business in the world is big business religion. Their crime was that they had turned the house of God into a den of thieves, taking that which was to be “the house of prayer” and making it a house of pleasure. Oh, they read the law and kept the feasts with great pomp and impressive ceremonies; but they made the Word of God of no effect by their practices.

Four Lessons
Is there a message in all this for us? The temple was destroyed 2000 years ago. We do not observe those holy days the Jew’s profaned. And, though I’ve seen a good many strange things in churches, I have never yet seen people selling animals and conducting a currency exchange in a church house. Such things would not surprise me; but I haven’t yet seen them. So I ask again, “Is there a message in all this for us?” Indeed there is.

In fact, there are many, very important lessons to be learned from this passage. Here are four.

The purging of the temple by our Lord Jesus stands out as one of the Master’s greatest displays of his absolute divinity. The fact that the scribes, and Pharisees, and Priests stood by and silently watched all that our Lord did here, strikes me as being as marvellous as our Saviour ordering the Roman soldiers in Gethsemane, and the legion of demons who begged his permission to go into a herd of hogs. Those who observed these things must have been completely awestruck.
Learn this, too. The house of God is his house. Christ is the Head, the only head, of his church. He is the King in this kingdom. There is no voice of authority but his voice, and no rule of faith and practice, but his Word.

Sometimes faithful men, men who seek the glory and honour of God, must get angry and show their anger. Those who would honour God cannot give approval to that which dishonours him. To be silent is to give approval. Our Saviour showed his disapproval of the wickedness before him. Let us follow his example.

The church of God is a house of prayer. When I speak of God’s church and God’s house, I’m not talking about a building. The church and temple and house of God is the assembly of his saints in the name of Christ for worship (Matthew 18:20; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 17). There is no room in the house of God for anything but prayer worship.

Be sure you understand that. There is no room in the house of God for anything except the worship of God, and worship according to the Word and Spirit of God. As it was in the days of Nehemiah, so it is today. The strength of those who are supposed to bear the burden has decayed; and there is a lot of garbage (much rubbish) in the house of God. If we would worship and serve our God, we must clear his house of all the rubbish men bring into it by their vain philosophies, religious traditions, and foolish sentiments (Nehemiah 4:10).

I say to you who read these lines, as Peter said to those who stood before him on the Day of Pentecost, “Save yourselves from this untoward (warped, winding, crooked, and perverse) generation” (Acts 2:40). There is so much rubbish in the churches of this day that a true gospel message cannot be preached in most places of worship, without utter warfare breaking out among those who profess to be worshipping God and serving him. Everyone has “a form of godliness” (religion), to which they tenaciously adhere, all the while denying the
power of true godliness (the gospel of the grace of God). The religious generation in which we find ourselves today was well described by the apostle Paul as a people, “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7).

There is so much rubbish in religion that the first thing a preacher has to do is get a big shovel and dump truck, clear out the rubbish and haul it to the garbage dump. Until that is done, nothing else can be done. We cannot build the walls of Zion upon a pile of garbage. We cannot build a wall of hope and security on religious rubbish. The foundation cannot be laid until the rubbish is recognized, dealt with, and hauled away. And cleaning up a pile of garbage is never easy or pleasant. But it must be done. Faithful men in every generation have found the work both necessary and costly. Moses had to deal with Korah and his crowd. Elijah constantly had to confront Ahab and Jezebel. Hezekiah had trouble on his hands when he destroyed the brazen serpent. Paul was compelled to deal with judaising legalists everywhere he went.

I have preached in a good many churches in the last 40 years; and I think I know where the problem is. I think I know what the rubbish is. Let me point out three things that must be dealt with, if we are going to build a wall of hope and refuge for eternity bound sinners in our day.

The Law Of God
In religious circles today, I am talking about churches of every brand, the holy, pure, immaculate, unchanging law of God has been whittled down to a set of rules for men to obey by mere outward religious exercise and outward conformity. Righteousness has been reduced to a work of man. This was the charge our Lord laid against the scribes and Pharisees of his day (Matthew 23:25-27). And this is the charge that must be laid against the religion and religious leaders of our day.
Saul of Tarsus was in exactly that condition before God saved him. He was a devoutly religious man. His religious zeal and devotion would put you and me to shame. But he did not know God at all. He had gone to church all his life. He graduated from the Gamaliel School of Theology with honours. He taught the scriptures. He was a man of indisputable morality. And he was a law-keeping legalist of the first order (Philippians 3:5, 6). Saul of Tarsus was a man who was deeply religious, who lived by the law, and boasted of his righteousness before the law. But he did not know God or his law. He was as lost as any sinner on the top side of God’s earth. Then, something happened (Acts 9; Romans 7:9). He said, “I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”

God the Holy Spirit came to that poor, lost religionist, revealed Christ in him, and in doing so revealed the true character of God’s holy law to him. When he saw Christ and was convinced by God the Holy Spirit that righteousness was accomplished and brought in by Christ (John 16:8-11), for the first time in his life, Saul was made to see that God requires truth in the inward parts; and he had nothing in himself but deceit. For the first time in his life, he saw that there was no comeliness in him, but only sin. God stripped him buck naked and brought him to shame (Romans 7:9-11). The law he once boasted of keeping now made him tremble, for it exposed his sin.

Has the Lord Jesus Christ ever come to you by the saving operations of his Spirit and revealed his holy law to you? Hear what he declares, “For I say 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” (Matthew 5:20).

That righteousness that God requires, you cannot perform. It is a righteousness performed for us by Christ and given to us by
grace. And godliness, true godliness is not outward, but inward. “The Lord looketh on the heart.” Christianity is not a creed, but a Person. It is not outward, but inward. It is “Christ in you, the hope of glory”!

That’s the first piece of garbage that must be hauled away, if we are to have a house of prayer and praise to God. We must be made to see that no man can, by anything he does or experiences, make himself righteous before God. The bondwoman and her son (works religion and all who promote it) must be cast out!

**Degenerate Worship**
The second problem is this. Worship, or what people call worship, has degenerated into nothing but religious entertainment and ceremony performed under the disguise of worship. Most churches are nothing but religious social clubs, with rules, regulations, and ceremonies, and a good place for businessmen to network. If God the Holy Spirit did not exist, it would not change a thing in most churches. Their program would move along without a glitch.

You don’t need the Spirit of God to make a decision for Jesus. But you must have him to be born again. You don’t need God the Holy Spirit to reform your life. But you must have him to be regenerated. You don’t need the Holy Spirit to make a profession of faith. But you must have him to get faith. You don’t need the Holy Spirit to learn a creed and learn to fight for it. But you must have him to learn the gospel. You don’t need the Spirit to stand up and testify. But you must have him to bow down and worship. You don’t need the Spirit of God to be devoted to religious activity and service. But you must have him to sit at the Master’s feet and hear his Word.

You don’t need the Spirit of God to be immersed in water. But you must have him to be baptized into Christ. You don’t need the Holy Spirit to observe the Lord’s Supper. But you must
have him to commune with Christ and remember him. You don’t need God the Holy Spirit to recite a prayer. But you must have him to pray. You don’t need the Spirit to give out a lesson. But you must have him to preach a message. You don’t need the Holy Spirit to give a tithe. But you must have him to offer two mites in the name of the Lord. You don’t need God the Holy Spirit to love religion. But you must have him to love one another. You don’t need the Spirit of God to meet together. But you must have him to be “the temple of the living God”!

If God the Holy Spirit did not exist, if there were no God, no Christ, no salvation, no eternal life, with most religious people, nothing would change. In most churches, nothing would change. You don’t need God to have a business meeting. But you must have him to have a prayer (worship) meeting. You don’t need God to be in the church. But you must have him to be in Christ. You don’t need God to have a church house. But you must have him to be a “habitation of God through the Spirit”.

As I read about our Saviour driving the money-changers and sacrifice peddlers out of the temple, I cannot help thinking to myself, how furious he must be with men’s intrusions into his house today. There is no place in the house of God, the house of prayer, for anything except that which involves the worship of God. Nothing should ever take place in the house of God, in the assembly of God’s saints except gospel preaching, gospel ordinances, prayer, and praise.

That’s the second problem. The churches of our day have said good-by to God. And worship has degenerated into nothing but man-centred religious activity. Cast out your programs and ceremonies, or you will never worship God!

A Corrupt Message
Here’s the third problem in churches around the world today. The church of this perverse age has substituted the message of the gospel, the message of God’s free and sovereign grace in
Christ, for a corrupt and perverse message of works.

Everywhere today people are told to stand up and be counted. The gospel of God demands that you bow down and worship. There’s a difference! The message of substitution, the message of our Lord’s blessed obedience and sin-atoning sacrifice, and salvation by him, in him, from him, and for him has been replaced with “Will you let God save you?” “Won’t you give your heart to Jesus?” “The decision is yours.” “You must do your part.” “What’s your decision?” “The Lord wants to save you.” “You need to start serving the Lord.” “Open your heart to the Lord, and he will come in.”

“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; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 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. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:6-9).

When we have cleared away the rubbish, the Foundation can be laid and the walls of Zion can be built. The Foundation is Jesus Christ crucified. In his day the only place where John the Baptist could preach the gospel was in the wilderness. There he lifted up his solitary voice in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, crying out to eternity-bound sinners, “Behold, the Lamb of God”! Let us, like John the Baptist, cry out to immortal souls in this wilderness, “Behold, the Lamb of God”!

Jesus Christ is not just a good example after whom you must pattern your life. He is “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”! He was not a religious reformer. He was and is God our Saviour. He did not die as a martyr in a noble cause. He died as the Lamb of God, a sin-atoning, blood
sacrifice for sin. He is not God who wants to save. He is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him. He is “God mighty to save”!

If the Lord God will give us grace today to clean out the rubbish, drive the merchandisers and their merchandise out of his house, and make his house a house of prayer for needy sinners, maybe, just maybe we will see the same thing happen that happened when our Saviour did it. We might just see sinners healed by his almighty grace (Matthew 21:14).
Chapter 32

“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? And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me: 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” (Luke 20:1-8).

Ungodliness In The House Of God

In this passage of scripture we see our Lord Jesus Christ walking in the temple with his disciples, teaching and preaching the gospel. As he walked back and forth through the house of God, a multitude gathered around and listened intently to his every word. The event recorded here took place the day after our Lord cursed the barren fig tree and drove the money changers from the temple, two days after his entrance into Jerusalem.

In the crowd, listening to our Saviour’s doctrine, were those chief priests, scribes, and elders who were determined to destroy the Master, his doctrine, and his people. Once more, they
thought they had a perfect opportunity to discredit him. The Lord Jesus had come into Jerusalem accepting the praises of men as the Messiah, the Christ of God. He entered the house of God, drove out the money changers, and set things in order as the Master of the house.

On top of all that, he called the house of God his house. Thus declaring himself to be God. As he preached the gospel of God in the house of God, contrary to the accepted traditions and customs of the Jews, these great, respected, scholarly infidels, who were the religious leaders of the Jewish world, demanded of the Lord Jesus the source of his authority.

What determined hatred these chief priests and scribes and elders had for the Son of God! What had the Lord Jesus done? He had preached the gospel to the poor. He had gone about healing all manner of sickness and disease among the people. Was this the cause of all their hatred and malignity? Strange as that may seem, it was. That is cause enough to Satan and his seed. It always has been and always will be, so long as the world shall stand. Is the offence of the cross ceased? Oh no! Let any of God’s servants in the present hour preach the gospel the Master preached, declaring that salvation is in his name alone, throwing all the goodness and righteousness of men to the ground and declaring that Christ’s blood and righteousness are the solitary cause of a sinner’s acceptance with God, and the religious leaders around him will rise up against him like angry hornet’s buzzing around his head.

When the religious, spiritual leaders of a church, denomination, nation, or age do not know God, when spiritual leaders are really infidels, those who blindly follow their blind guides do so to the eternal peril of their souls!

Here are four spiritual evils, four glaring matters of ungodliness, which stand out in these verses, as beacons to warn us.
Spiritual Ignorance
First, Luke shows us the evil of spiritual ignorance displayed in these religious men. You may think, “How can spiritual ignorance be called an evil thing? Can a person be faulted for his ignorance in the things of God?”

Yes, a person can and should be, indeed shall be, held accountable by God for that which he could have known and should have known had he simply walked in the light God gave him. Do you understand the implications of what I have just stated? Not only will God Almighty hold you accountable at the Day of Judgment for everything you have heard and despised concerning the gospel of his dear Son, he will hold you accountable for everything you could have heard had you chosen to do so.

Those things are true of all men; but they are especially true concerning those men who assume the responsibility of teaching others and preaching to others and leading others in the name of God.

That man who speaks to, teaches, leads, and preaches to others in the name of God better have a firm, well-grounded assurance concerning a few things. Writing as I now do in God’s name, I assume a tremendous weight of responsibility. Knowing what I do of God’s character, his Word, and the seriousness of this business of addressing immortal souls in the name of God, I would not dare speak (or write) another word, or continue another day in the work of the ministry, if I were not certain of these things. I say to any man, old or young, who is just chomping at the bit to be a preacher, before you assume this work, you better be certain that you know God and the gospel of his grace, God has called you and sent you to this work, you have a message from God, you faithfully proclaim God’s message.

Though all are responsible for their own souls, those who are set as watchmen over immortal souls are also responsible for
those souls (Ezekiel 3:17-21; 33:1-20).

What does all that have to do with Luke 20:1-8? Just this: these chief priests, scribes, and elders stand before us as glaring examples of the fact that those who hold highest place in the religious world are often totally ignorant of the things of God.

They men were the most highly trained, specialized religious scholars of the time. They were selected from an elite group of elite men. They were not just priests, they were the chief priests. They were not just teachers, they were the scribes. They were not just elders, they were the elders.

These men were regarded by the religious world of their day as the very source and fountain of all spiritual knowledge. They were, for the most part, direct descendants of Aaron; and they could prove it. Their doctrine had the full weight and force of mainstream, historic Jewish tradition; and they could prove that, too.

But these men did not know God from a box of rocks. Spiritually, they were totally blind. They had the scriptures memorized, categorized, and compartmentalized; but they had absolutely no understanding of the message of the Book. They could tell you everything you could want to know about God and his Son, the Christ, the Messiah, except one thing. They could not tell you who he is! They could not spot him when he stood in their midst.

Spiritual knowledge comes by divine revelation. I wonder if we will ever learn this. In spiritual matters nothing matters except spiritual matters. Worldly approval, academic scholarship, historic approval, celebrated fame, religious order, and religious tradition are all meaningless. Indeed, these things are an absolute hindrance unless we are taught of God. We know nothing until God, by his Spirit, causes the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to shine in our hearts. Christ must be revealed in us (2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

Once that happens, once Christ is revealed in a person, he is
unceasingly taught of God and convinced of three things. These three things are the most important truths we ever consider. They are indescribably deep. We can never fully learn them. Yet, if we are taught of God, we will never cease to learn them, as long as we live in this world. They are …

1. Sin. Our own sin, the depravity of our hearts, the corruption of our evil deeds, and the filth of our righteousnesses!

2. Righteousness. The righteousness of God accomplished and brought in for us by Christ’s obedience as our representative!

3. Judgment. Judgment finished at Calvary by the substitutionary satisfaction of divine justice (John 16:8-11; Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:21)!

As you care for your soul and for the souls of your families and for all who may be influenced by you, try the spirits to see whether they be of God (1 John 4:1-3).

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh 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.”

Spiritual ignorance, ignorance of Christ and his gospel, among preachers, teachers, and religious leaders is an inexcusable evil, by which multitudes are being led to hell. When blind men are led by blind men, both fall into the ditch.

Yet, there is more to aggravate the wickedness of their ignorance. They were wilfully ignorant of Christ. Their ignorance arose from their enmity against the Master. It was the fruit of their malice toward and hatred of Christ and his doctrine. Our Lord’s miraculous works spoke for themselves. None but God could do the work he did. Nicodemus recognized that fact
(John 3:2). And every man with common sense recognizes it. But these men refused the obvious, because to acknowledge the obvious would require that they acknowledge Christ and his doctrine.

**Religious Curiosity**

The second evil, the second display of ungodliness we see in these men, and often see in the house of God today is the evil of religious curiosity.

What multitudes there are who are curious about spiritual things! The more mysterious a matter is, the more their curiosity is stirred. They care nothing for plainly revealed truth. They despise things that are obvious and important, needful and vital. But, they love to talk about and debate obscure things. In verses 27-37 the Sadducees asked the Master a trick question about the resurrection. Mind you, they did not believe in the resurrection; but they wanted to debate it.

People like the scribes and their companions abound in every generation. They are all alike enemies to the pure truths of the gospel. Their religion is nothing but curiosity. You will be wise to avoid them as you would the plague (1 Timothy 1:4).

**Religious Pride**

Third, these religious hypocrites also show us the horrid evil of religious pride and arrogance. Here is a group of men, pretending that they are doing God’s service, daring to challenge the incarnate God himself about his authority, moved by nothing but envy, jealousy, arrogance, and pride. They were not even slightly motivated by the glory of God. Their only concern was their own position and power. They said, “By what authority doest thou these things?”

They could not refute his doctrine. They could not make any charge of wickedness stick. They could not deny the power of God displayed in his works. The only thing left was to challenge
his right to do the things he did in the name of God. They were asking, “By what authority do you preach? Who ordained you? What right do you have to curse a fig tree, created by God? How dare you come into the house of God and set things in order, without consulting us?”

Nothing makes a lost religious man more arrogant, insecure, envious, and malicious than the sight of another man doing the will of God; preaching the truth of God he refuses to preach; consecrated to the glory of God, while he is consecrated to nothing but himself; secure in the place of God, while he senses nothing but insecurity; at rest in the will of God, when he cannot find a moment’s rest in his own soul.

It is spiritual pride and arrogance, especially among religious leaders, which keeps men from bowing to the truth of God, when plainly confronted with it; and the embarrassment of having that wickedness exposed in their own hearts makes those, who normally appear to be so sugary sweet, raging persecutors. It was the spiritual arrogance of these men which dragged them down to hell. Everyone acknowledged that John the Baptist was a prophet of God; but these fine men were not about to sit at the feet of such an unacceptable teacher. Because they would not hear God’s servant, they could not believe God’s Son. Christ declared and displayed in undeniable ways his Messiahship and Godhood; but they refused to believe him. It would simply have cost them too much. Because they refused to hear God’s messenger and refused to believe God’s Son, they despised God’s ordinance of believer’s baptism.

**Spiritual Dishonesty**

Spiritual ignorance always leads to spiritual arrogance; and spiritual ignorance and arrogance always produce the evil of spiritual dishonesty. Those who are, by their wilful unbelief, prejudiced against the truth of God, in the attempt to justify themselves, will, without hesitation, lie and act in dishonesty to
their own consciences. There is nothing dishonest men will not do to save face before men. Our Lord did not ask these men a hard, perplexing question. He just asked them whether John’s ministry was of God, or of men (vv. 3, 4).

They did not even think about giving a plain, honest, straightforward answer. Immediately, they put their heads together, not to find out the truth, but to figure out how to save face (vv. 5-7, 31). Rather than speak the truth, they told a direct and obvious lie. They said, “We cannot tell.” In reply to our Lord’s question whether John’s baptism was from heaven or of men, “they answered that they could not tell.” That was an obvious lie. They could have told, but they would not do so. They knew that if they said what they really believed they would condemn themselves. If they confessed that John was a prophet sent from God, they would be guilty of a gross inconsistency in not believing his testimony about Christ as the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the Saviour of needy sinners, who came to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Men and women will say anything rather than acknowledge themselves to be in the wrong. Lying is just one of the sins to which the human heart is most naturally inclined, and one of the most common evils in the world. Gehazi and Ananias and Sapphira have more followers and imitators in the house of God than Peter and Paul.

Lessons
You can mark this down as a matter of certainty. If God is pleased to use you, men will envy you, despise you, and do everything within their power to discredit you. If they cannot destroy you, they will try to destroy your influence. Our Lord Jesus found his most malicious enemies (the Pharisees) in the house of God. Paul found his greatest foes (false apostles and Judaisers) in the house of God. Even the beloved John had his foe (Diotrephes) in the house of God.
The best way I know of to deal with those who oppose us, oppose the gospel of the grace of God, oppose the work we do, and oppose our God is to ignore them, just as our Lord did, when he replied, “Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things” (v. 8).

Rarely do men and women rightly esteem and value the ministry of the gospel. In this passage, as he often did, our Lord Jesus highly commended John the Baptist and the ministry the Lord gave him in his day. Like John the Baptist, every true gospel preacher is sent of God to point out the Lamb of God and declare his work, to prepare the way of the Lord, to call sinners to repentance, showing them the way of life and faith in Christ (Isaiah 52:7), and to leave all who believe not without excuse.

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13).
Chapter 33

“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. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. 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. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid. 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? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. 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” (Luke 20:9-19).

God’s Church His Vineyard
We have before us in these verses one of our Lord’s parables that is recorded in great detail by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. That fact alone is sufficient to demonstrate that this is a parable of tremendous importance.

This is clearly a historical parable. We are told in verse nineteen that the chief priests, scribes and elders of the Jews “perceived that” the Lord Jesus “had spoken the parable against them.” The history of the Jewish nation, from the time that the Lord brought them out of Egypt until the time of their destruction in 70 AD, is set before us in these verses. Under the emblem of a vineyard and husbandmen (videdressers), our Master tells us the story of God’s dealings with that nation, both in great mercy and in great judgment.

This parable is recorded here in the Book of God to stand as a beacon to warn us, lest we who have received and experienced far greater mercies than the Jews ever did should also at last be dashed in pieces upon the rocks of God’s righteous retribution and judgment.

There is no question that our Lord is here speaking directly to the scribes and Pharisees, to the nation of Israel and their religious leaders in his day. They are the husbandmen described in the parable. Their sins are set before us in plain words. They persecuted and killed God’s prophets, generation after generation. At last, they murdered God’s darling Son!

There can be no doubt that the parable was directly intended to be a word of condemnation against the Jewish nation. But it is a serious mistake for anyone to read these words and say, “That applies to the Jews. It has no reference to me.” “A godly man”, wrote John Trapp, “reads the scriptures as he doth the statute-book. He holds himself concerned in all that he reads. He finds his name written in every passage and lays it to heart, as spoken to him. The wicked, on the other side, put off all they like not, and dispose of it to others.”
Let us not be so foolish. The parable of the wicked husbandmen is a parable by which the Son of God speaks to us. "He that hath an ear, let him hear." The Jews who heard this parable fall from the lips of the Son of God refused to heed its lessons. Therefore that nation is to this day under the curse of God’s holy wrath and just judgment. When they had the light, they refused to walk in the light. Therefore God has sent blindness and darkness upon them.

This is what God the Holy Spirit intends for us to learn from this parable: “Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee” (Romans 11:20, 21). With that warning in mind, I direct your attention to the very important lessons to be learned from this parable.

The churches, preachers, teachers and spiritual leaders of our land, those who profess to be God’s servants, those who are responsible to teach us God’s Word and God’s ways, have long since abandoned the Word and truth of God. The result of that apostasy is the abounding ungodliness of this reprobate age. Let us beware, lest we follow this religious generation to everlasting ruin.

**God’s Church**

First, we see here that God’s church in this world is his vineyard (v. 9). When I refer to God’s church in this world, as is the case in all the New Testament, I primarily have in mind the local church, local gospel churches. There certainly are applications of this parable to be made to the church universal; but it speaks principally of the church local; local assemblies of men and women who profess to be followers of Christ and his gospel. Every true gospel church is a vineyard of God’s planting. It belongs to the Lord. He separated a piece of ground for it. He planted it. He has hedged it about. A true gospel church is the greatest blessing God can bestow upon any community in this
What a great and rare privilege and blessing it is to live in a place where God has raised up a people to worship him, by whom the gospel of his free, sovereign, saving grace is proclaimed!

**Husbandmen**

We are also told in verse 9 that the Lord God has let out this vineyard to us, his people, as his husbandmen. There is no greater privilege than this in the world, and no greater responsibility under heaven than this.

God the Holy Spirit tells us that “we have this treasure in earthen vessels” (2 Corinthians 4:7). The treasure we carry through the world as God’s servants is the gospel of his grace, by which he communicates to chosen sinners all the blessings of grace and salvation in Christ (Ephesians 1:3-14). But we who carry this treasure are only “earthen vessels”, broken clay pots, worthless and meaningless. We are nothing but sinners saved by grace, no more; but the treasure we carry, by which God is pleased to save his elect, is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Expected Fruit**

Third, at the appointed season, the Lord God looks for and rightfully expects to find fruit from the husbandmen of his vineyard (v. 10). The rent he requires of us is very reasonable. All he demands from us is that we reverence his Son (v. 13). God simply requires that we worship his Son.

Read verses 10-14 carefully. Here we see that as men and women deal with and treat God’s faithful servants, so they deal with and treat God’s Son.

“And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. And again he sent a third:
and they wounded him also, and cast him out. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. 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.”

Religion Loved And Christ Hated
Lost religious men and women love religion, religious duties, religious activity, religious ceremonies, religious history, and religious tradition, but utterly despise God, his Son, and his gospel, and would (if they could) cast God’s Son off his throne, out of his Kingdom, and kill him. “They reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours” (v. 14). That is exactly what was prophesied in Psalm 2.

The reason preachers, teachers, churches, and religious leaders despise and cast Christ and his Word out is simply this: They want the vineyard for themselves.

Conviction Not Conversion
Learn this too: there are many who experience conviction who are never converted (v. 19).

“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.”

It takes something more than a guilty, condemning conscience to produce repentance and faith in the heart. That is the gift of God’s saving goodness and grace (Romans 2:4; Ephesians 2:8, 9; Zechariah 12:10). “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.”

Despised Mercy
Our Lord here warns us that mercy despised will be taken away (vv. 15, 16). If we despise the privileges and opportunities God
has given us, he will both take away those great privileges and make those things which might have been the means of our eternal salvation the very basis of our everlasting ruin.

Present privileges are no guarantee of future privileges. The Lord Jesus warns us that he will remove the candlestick that is despised. If the preaching of the gospel is not a savour of life, it will be to you a savour of death.

The time came when the cup of Israel’s iniquity was full and God would tolerate them no more. In 70AD, just 40 years after this parable was uttered, God sent Titus and the armies of Rome into Jerusalem to destroy the holy city, the temple, and the nation. From that day to this, the Jews have been scattered over the face of the whole earth.

Nothing offends God like the neglect of his gospel and his grace. The churches of Asia Minor, once so strong, are now gone. Africa, once the cradle of light, is now the house of darkness. England, once so full of light and life, is now a graveyard of religious relics and memories. Much, much has been given to us; and much shall be required of us.

John Trapp said, “The gospel is that inheritance we received from our forefathers. It must be our care to transmit the same to our posterity.” Truth is the legacy we have received from the preceding generations of God’s saints, and truth is the legacy we must leave to the generations that follow. And that particular body of truth which we are responsible to maintain is the gospel of Christ. Our creed is, and ever must be, “Jesus Christ and him crucified”. The truth we must preserve and declare is the great “mystery of godliness”, redemption by Jesus Christ, the incarnate God.

**God’s Purpose Sure**

Though many do despise God’s grace, and thus heap destruction upon themselves, when he takes the gospel from one people, he gives it to another, and the purpose of God is not thwarted or
even hindered. Christ is still exalted and his people shall be saved (vv. 17, 18; Romans 11:25, 26, 33-36).

Many reject and despise God’s salvation, refusing to build upon the foundation he has laid; but Christ is still exalted. Though many refuse to believe the gospel and are cast off for their unbelief, God has not cast off his people. There is yet a remnant according to the election of grace; and that remnant shall be saved (Romans 11:1-5). God’s purpose is not hindered by man’s unbelief (Romans 3:3, 4).

The Only Way
The only way a sinner can ever be saved is to fall on that Rock of Salvation which God has laid in Zion, Christ Jesus. “Whosoever shall fall on that Stone shall be broken” (v. 18). If Christ falls on you in judgment, he will grind you to powder, and your everlasting ruin beneath the weight of this Stone will be inescapable and complete. “On whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (v. 18).

“Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh stir up thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. O LORD God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure. Thou makest us a strife unto our neighbours: and our enemies laugh among themselves. Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river. Why hast
thou then broken down her hedges, so that all they which pass by the way do pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it. Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; And the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted, and the branch that thou madest strong for thyself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down: they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of man whom thou madest strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee: quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved” (Psalm 80:1-19).
“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. 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: Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Shew me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar’s. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s. And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace” (Luke 20:19-26).

Of God And Caesar

**Momentary Conviction**
The first thing that strikes me in this passage is the alarming fact that men and women who ultimately perish under the wrath of God often have fleeting moments of what might be called conviction by the Word of God. As soon as our Lord declared the impending wrath and judgment of God that was upon them,
the Jews were pricked in their consciences because they knew their guilt (v 16); but they quickly overcame that sense of guilt.

This ought to be alarming. As with these lost, self-righteous, religious men, there are moments in the lives of unregenerate men and women, when they are pricked in their consciences by the law of God and compelled to acknowledge their guilt. But legal fear, the fear of divine judgment is not, in itself Holy Spirit conviction. Legal fear soon passes, as it did with these men.

Holy Spirit conviction is conviction that cannot be resisted and never passes. Holy Spirit conviction only increases. It never fades. Holy Spirit conviction is conviction that involves more than a sense of guilt and the terror of hell, though that certainly is a part of it. Holy Spirit conviction arises not from the terror of the law, but from the good news of the gospel. Holy Spirit conviction is the conviction of God-given faith wrought in the heart by the revelation of Christ in us (Zechariah 12:10; 13:1; John 16:8-11).

**Our Merciful Saviour**

Read verses 17 and 18, and adore our great, gracious, and merciful Saviour.

“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? Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

What a delightful picture! As soon as our Saviour heard their cry of anguish and fear, he looked upon them in tenderness, pointed them to the scriptures with which they were very familiar, declaring that the Christ of whom they read in the Book of God every sabbath day has come. And, looking forward to the day when it would be finished before their eyes, he announced that his work was accomplished. “The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?” Then, our
merciful Redeemer called upon these men to fall upon him in true repentance and be broken, saying, “Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken.”

He has become the Head of the Corner, God has highly exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins to poor, needy sinners, because he has finished his work. Fall on him, and you shall be broken in repentance. Fall on him, and you shall be lifted in forgiveness.

In the same breath, our Saviour warned those men that if they persisted in their self-righteousness and unbelief, he would surely fall on them in his wrath and grind them to powder. “Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.”

Flying in the teeth of mercy, these men hardened their hearts, like Pharaoh of old, and refused to trust the Saviour. They refused to fall on him in faith, choosing death rather than life. With the Word of God in their hands and the Son of God standing before them, they stood firm as enemies of God’s Christ in their hearts. What aggravated condemnation they stirred against themselves! Oh, may God the Holy Spirit save you and me from such folly and graciously force us now and continually, by his irresistible mercy, to fall on Christ!

**Enraged Religionists**

In verses 19 and 20 we see how utterly enraged self-righteous religionists become when confronted with the claims of Christ.

“\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.\”

The claims of Christ will either break you or harden you.
When you are confronted with the gospel of God’s free, saving grace in Christ, you will either be broken in repentance or hardened in self-righteousness. You cannot hear the gospel and be neutral. You will either take sides with God against yourself, or you will take sides with yourself against God. These proud, self-righteous religious men, enraged by the word of the sovereign Christ, words by which they had been exposed to themselves, decided it was time to kill him.

The old proverb goes, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” But the fury of a woman scorned is a sweet consolation compared to the rage of men whose righteousness is scorned by God!

The gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ is always offensive to lost religious people. That is the way it was then; and that is the way it is now. The offence of the cross has not ceased (Galatians 5:11). Divine sovereignty puts us all entirely in God’s hands. That offends man’s pride. Total depravity declares man to be basically evil, not good. That offends man’s righteousness. Unconditional election makes salvation a matter wholly determined by the immutable will of God. That offends man’s most treasured god, his will! Limited atonement makes salvation to be merited by and secured by Christ alone. That offends man’s high esteem of his own works. Irresistible grace makes the new birth, repentance, and faith the works and gifts of God the Holy Spirit. That offends man’s arrogant sense of power, his high sense of personal divinity. Perseverance of the saints makes salvation, grace, and eternal life entirely dependent upon the work of God. That offends man’s love of his own righteousness.

**Flattering Enemies**

Those who are our most bitter foes often come against us as a flattering friends rather than enraged enemies. In verse 20 we read that the chief priests and scribes sent out spies who
“feigned themselves just men”, who pretended to be honest and sincere. But their purpose was to entrap the Lord Jesus and find a trumped-up excuse for having him executed by the Roman government. We read their flattering speech in verse 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.”

What these men stated was completely true, and they knew it was true; but they hated him and his doctrine. They acknowledged that what he had just said concerning himself and them was right. They asserted that our Saviour is not blinded by the outward appearance of men. And they asserted that he taught the things of God truthfully.

It is not at all unusual for liars to speak truth with lying hearts. Their words sounded good and admiring. An ignorant bystander might have thought, “These men are sincerely interested in truth.” But their words were nothing but an outward covering for inward hatred. They were wolves who put on the sheep’s clothing for convenience, under the insane notion of deceiving the Lord of Glory. As the Psalmist put it, their “words were smoother than butter, but war was in their heart.” Their “words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords” (Psalm 55:21).

If you are wise, you will pay no attention to flattering tongues. Many have been ruined by the world’s seductive kindness, who stood strong and firm against the world’s persecutions (Psalms 12:2; 26:28).

Sweet things cause more sickness than bitter things. The warm, balmy sunshine of a bright summer day is far more likely to make a man shed his protective armour than the freezing blasts of winter. The devil is never so dangerous as when he appears to be our friend. And the world is never so dangerous to our souls as when it smiles and flatters.

There is never a lack of people who profess with their lips to
love Christ, while in heart they deny him. There are always some, who “by good words and fair speeches”, will attempt to deceive. God’s servants in every age and in every place have to deal with men like Diotrephes (Romans 16:18; Proverbs 26:23). Mark such men and avoid them. Do not indulge them.

**Overruling Providence**

I cannot fail to show you once more the sweet consolation of God’s overruling providence. These enraged, self-righteous, religious men pursued their lust with eagerness. They wanted to have the Lord of Glory executed with haste. The Holy Spirit tells us that it was “the same hour”. Yet, the scriptures teach us that every tiny detail and circumstance which attended the crucifixion and death of our blessed Redeemer was performed precisely according to the will of God, according to his own, sovereign, eternal purpose of grace, to accomplish our salvation by the sacrifice of his darling Son (Isaiah 53:10; John 19:10, 11; Acts 2:23; 4:27, 28).

**God And Caesar**

In verses 22-26 as our Master, our Lord, and King, and Saviour answers the question of these hypocrites concerning paying taxes to Caesar, he teaches us that in all matters of civil law, it is our duty to be obedient to civil government.

“Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no? But he perceived their craftiness, and said unto them, Why tempt ye me? Show me a penny. Whose image and superscription hath it? They answered and said, Caesar’s. And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar’s, and unto God the things which be God’s. And they could not take hold of his words before the people: and they marvelled at his answer, and held their peace.”

The attempt of these men in the instance here mentioned, was for the purpose of bringing an accusation against the Lord
Jesus to the Roman government. The Jews at that time were under bondage to Rome; and they utterly hated Caesar and the Romans. The whole nation was looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, whom they thought would deliver them from their modern-day Babylonian Captivity.

Yet, in their hatred of the Messiah whom they claimed to love, they hatched their crafty scheme to entrap him. No matter how the Saviour answered, they were sure they would snare him with his words. If he confessed the authority of the Roman government, they thought he would lose his popularity among the people, whom they feared. If he denied the Romans’ right to tribute, they would have hurriedly taken him before Pontius Pilate, to have him condemned. These are the men spoken of prophetically in Psalm 22:12. “Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.”

Our blessed Saviour not only foiled their craftiness, he seized the opportunity to teach us what our attitude ought to always be toward civil government. The Holy Spirit gives us the commentary on his words in Romans 13:1-7.

“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. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom
fear; honour to whom honour.”

I do not approve of many things, indeed, of most things promoted and encouraged by the institutions of government in our country (the USA). I am thankful for the nation, love it, and am willing to fight to the death to defend the land and liberty God has given us. But those laws of the land that tend to destroy the very fabric of society, I do not and cannot condone.

However, wherever the laws of the land do not demand that I violate the Word of God, I am and must be obedient to the laws of civil government. We must be obedient to God, regardless of cost or consequence, even when law forbids our obedience (Acts 4:18-20). But, where Caesar does not demand disobedience to Christ, we must render unto Caesar the things that are his.

This is something that I think about and pray about a good bit, as I am sure you do, particularly as we see the current trend of legislation, promoting promiscuity of every imaginable measure: homosexuality, fornication, and adultery, abortion (a pretty word for murdering babies) and euthanasia (the murder of people considered no longer fit to live). What are our responsibilities as believers toward civil government? Our divinely ordained responsibility to our government can be summarized in three words: pay, pray, and obey!

1. Pay: it has been said, “Only two things are sure: death and taxes; and of the two, taxes is the more painful.” There are many who for various reasons, usually religious fanaticism, consider it their duty not to pay taxes. The IRS takes a slightly different view of the matter. Even though the tax code talks about “voluntary compliance”, I personally know some who have wound up in prison because they chose not to pay their taxes. But our concern, our only concern as believers is this: What does God have to say to us about paying taxes to our government? “Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s.”

Someone might say, “But Caesar and the Romans were not
like our governmental leaders or our country.” And you are right. Caesar and the Romans were indescribably more abominably wicked (Read Romans 1). Idolatry was rampant among the Romans and promoted by the Roman government. Caesar demanded that men worship him as a god. Abortion was as commonplace as breakfast. Immorality of every imaginable variety was considered morality, and opposition to it was considered treasonous hatred.

2. Pray: not only are we to pay our lawful taxes, (I mean by that taxes required by law, not taxes we consider lawful!), our God teaches us to pray for Caesar. In giving instructions for the local church to the young pastor Timothy, Paul wrote …

“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. (3) For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour” (1 Timothy 2:1-3).

“Prayers” are addresses made to our God in the name of Christ. The word “supplications” has the idea of praying for God to meet the need of another. “Intercessions” are prayers offered with compassion. “Giving of thanks” is the expressed gratitude to God for his good providence in giving us the civil leaders he has ordained as “ministers of God to” us. We have precisely the rulers we have because God has made them our rulers to minister to us; and they always minister to us, according to the will of our God, even godless, pagan kings (Ezra 7:27; Proverbs 16:1; 21:1).

The Spirit of God is tells us that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving and thanks” are to be made for “all men”, and particularly “for kings and for all who are in authority.” That means that we are, as believers, to pray for our President, for members of Congress and the Supreme Court, for
the governor, for our state senators and assemblymen, for our mayor and council members, irrespective of our opinion of these men and women. They need our prayers.

And, what is more, we need to pray for them. We would be far more useful to our nation if we spent more thought, time, and energy praying for our civil rulers than we do complaining about them.

3. Obey: Paul said, “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.” Remember, Paul was living under a very oppressive government, the very government that executed our Lord Jesus Christ, the same government that would arrest, torture, and kill untold thousands of his followers. Yet the word from the Lord is very clear: we are to be subject to the governing authorities. We are to obey the laws of the land, for government has been established by God to keep order. In general, it is the lawbreakers, not the law-abiders, who have reason to fear the government. We may find much about the government at every level with which we take issue, but without the government, there would be chaos. Therefore, we are to obey. That is the rule, obey the government.

Exceptions
But I would remind you of your school days and what you learned from English grammar. There are rules and there are exceptions to most rules. We learned “i before e except after c.” Then we were told to memorize the exceptions. The exceptions do not negate the rules, but they modify them. Similarly, there are exceptions to the rule of obeying the government. There are times when disobedience is necessary because we answer to a higher authority. There are three obvious examples in Scripture.

In Daniel’s day, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship the king’s golden image, and were cast into the fiery
furnace, because God’s people were ordered not to pray to their God.

Daniel, in violation of the law, worshipped the Lord God, refused to obey the king’s decree, and for that was thrown into the lion’s den.

In the Book of Acts we are told that believers were ordered not to teach the people in the name of Jesus. “Peter and the other apostles answered and said: We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

When any government orders God’s elect to do something that violates a clear command of God, we have no choice but to disobey and then be willing to suffer the consequences for Christ’s sake. But disobedience to government is the exception to the rule. We are not to disobey civil law just because we do not like the laws imposed, or because we think they are ridiculous, or even because we are certain that they are base and vile, as many of our laws are at their core. As long as we are not required to disobey our God, we are to obey those who rule over us, supporting our government and praying for our nation. We who believe God ought to be the best citizens of the land.

Let me give you a good reason for this: We are citizens of another country and servants of another King (1 Peter 2:9-17). “Render (therefore) to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” Give Caesar your taxes and your respect. Give God your heart, your devotion, your faith, your confidence, your praise, your reverence, your life.
“Then came to him certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him, 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. 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. 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. 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” (Luke 20:27-38).

“Children Of The Resurrection”

In this portion of scripture we have the Sadducees’ attempt to entrap our Lord Jesus. The Sadducees were the smallest but by
far the most wealthy and influential of the Jewish sects. They were the aristocrats of Judaism, and for the most part controlled the priesthood and the temple. Though that was the case, the Sadducees were not commonly respected by the people. They, supposing themselves to be smarter than God, denied the resurrection. They were the most liberal sect of the Jews. They were religious; but their religion was the religion of infidelity.

The Sadducees’ religion was nothing more than a philosophical system of carnal reason with religious overtones. They did not believe in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, or eternity. They did not believe that heaven and hell are real. The Sadducees believed that when men and women die, they die like dogs, that the death of the body is the end of a person’s existence. They used the scriptures, taught the scriptures, and professed to believe the scriptures. As we see in the passage before us, they could even recite the scriptures from memory. These were “smart” men, well-educated, and very knowledgeable. They were sure the Lord Jesus would be completely stumped by their pretentious question. But their religion was altogether a religion of infidelity; and they were completely stumped by the Master’s answer.

Our Lord Jesus Christ graciously turned the quibbles of these infidels into an opportunity to teach us that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, and that all the children of God are “the children of the resurrection”. In this passage of holy scripture, as we consider the ludicrous question of the Sadducees and the answer our Master gave them, four things stand out as matters of great importance.

**Religious Infidelity**

First, the Sadducees stand before us as glaring examples of religious infidelity. The vast majority of people in this world who profess the name of Christianity, including the most powerful and most influential religious leaders of it, are really
only religious infidels. Their religion is a matter of convenience, not conviction. It is, for the most part, a religion, which holds the Word of God, the truth of God, the gospel of God, the will of God, and the glory of God in utter contempt, just like these Sadducees.

The Sadducees laughed at the doctrine of the resurrection. They were simply too “smart”, too “educated”, too “enlightened”, to believe such religious sentiments. The question they posed to the Lord Jesus illustrates both their hypocrisy and their arrogance. They hypocritically pretended to have reverence for the Lord Jesus Christ, calling him “Master”. They pretended to reverence the scriptures as the Word of God. And they pretended to have concern for heavenly, spiritual things.

These men presented their question as though it were a factual thing, as though they were really interested in knowing the answer. Any statistician will tell you that you would have a far greater chance of winning the lottery than of seven brothers marrying the same wife, after each had died, leaving the woman childless! The only thing these men were interested in was raising a question, which they were confident the Master could not answer.

We will be wise to mark the things recorded here and learn from them not to allow modern religious infidels to entrap us. When carping religious infidels want to argue with you, just ignore them. Give them plain statements of Scripture, and leave them alone. If you get into a hissing contest with a snake, you are going to lose. Such people always try to press difficult and abstruse points. They always act dishonestly. And they deserve nothing but contempt.

In Mark 12:24 we read that our Lord Jesus plainly told this same group of men that they were totally ignorant both of the scriptures and of the power of God. “And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the
scriptures, neither the power of God?” Spiritual ignorance and doctrinal error may always be traced to these two things: (1.) ignorance of the Word of God, and (2.) ignorance of God’s power. These men did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, because they did not know the teaching of holy scripture and knew nothing of the power of God.

I do not doubt for a moment that they knew the letter of the scriptures. No doubt, they could quote huge passages from the Bible from memory. I do not doubt that they were very keenly aware of the historic events and chronological order of things recorded in the scriptures. They knew the history of Israel, and even knew what the prophecies of the Old Testament said. But they had absolutely no knowledge of the meaning and message of holy scripture. Their understanding was nothing but the understanding of carnal reason and religious tradition.

Do you understand the message of holy scripture? The Book of God is all about Christ. The message of holy scripture is the gospel of Christ (Luke 24:27, 32, 44, 45; John 5:39; 1 Peter 1:23-25). Spiritual knowledge is not merely doctrinal knowledge, creedal knowledge, logical knowledge, and factual knowledge. Spiritual knowledge is the revealed knowledge of a person, and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ.

These silly men wanted to argue about the doctrine of the resurrection. But the resurrection is more than a doctrine. It is a person. Christ is the Resurrection (John 11:25). You cannot know the Person without knowing the doctrine; but you certainly can know the doctrine of Christ without knowing Christ himself. Salvation involves more than doctrinal knowledge. Salvation is knowing Christ (John 17:3). Christ is the Resurrection and the Life of chosen sinners: representatively in redemption (Ephesians 2:4-6), experimentally in regeneration (John 5:25; Revelation 20:6; Colossians 3:1-3), and prospectively in the last day (Colossians 3:4).

The truth of God, the gospel of his grace, is much more than
doctrinal, historical facts. The gospel is a Person, the crucified Christ (John 14:6). Without question, this Person is revealed and made known to us and in us in the context of revealed, doctrinal truth. But life and salvation comes by knowing the Triune God himself in the Person of our all glorious Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God (John 17:3; 2 Timothy 1:12). Salvation is not merely knowing about Christ. Salvation is knowing Christ as my God, my Surety, my Substitute, my King, my Priest, my Prophet, and my Saviour!

Spiritual ignorance, doctrinal error, and heresy of every kind, according to our Saviour’s word, must be traced to ignorance of the power of God. I take that to mean three things. These three things, you will find throughout the scriptures, are what is meant by the power of God.

Spiritual ignorance arises from and must be traced to an utter ignorance of God’s sovereignty, his absolute authority as God. Spiritual ignorance arises from and must be traced to an utter ignorance of God’s omnipotence, his almightiness as God. Spiritual ignorance arises from and must be traced to an utter ignorance of God’s gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:15, 16).

These Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, because they were totally ignorant of God’s sovereignty, his omnipotence, and his gospel. All heresy, all spiritual ignorance must be attributed to these things.

All false religion, all freewill, works religion denies the sovereignty of God’s will and purpose in election and predestination, the omnipotence of his power and grace in redemption, regeneration, and effectual calling, and the power of the gospel’s good news of redemption accomplished by the blood of his dear Son. The preaching of the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (1 Corinthians 1:17-24).
Worthiness For Heaven
In our Lord’s answer to these carping infidels we find sweet and precious things for our souls.

“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” (vv. 34-36).

The first thing he tells us is that there are some people in this world who are “accounted worthy to obtain” the world to come. It is written, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50). “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” (Revelation 21:27). Yet, our Lord Jesus asserts here, and the Word of God elsewhere declares, that there are some people in this world who are counted worthy to obtain the world to come (Colossians 1:12-14; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5).

Who are these people? What makes them worthy to obtain the world to come? These four things identify them; and these four things make them worthy of heavenly glory.

The record book of heaven! Their names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, written there from eternity as worthy (Romans 8:28-30). The Redeemer’s precious blood! The blood of Christ has freed them from all sin. The righteousness of God! They are completely, perfectly and immutably righteous in Christ, made the very “righteousness of God in him”.

The regeneration of grace! Being born-again by God the Holy Spirit, they are made “partakers of the divine nature”. Christ is in them; and Christ in them is “the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

Every year I travel to at least one foreign country preaching
the gospel of Christ. I have crossed the borders of our nation north, south, east, and west. Whenever I leave this country and cross into another, three things are required: (1.) I have to have a birth certificate to prove my citizenship. (2.) I have to have a visa from the country receiving me. And (3.) I have to have a clean record, no criminal record. Soon I will leave this land of sorrow and sin. I hope to enter into the bliss and glory of heaven. I hope to stand forever accepted as a citizen of the New Jerusalem. This is the basis of my hope …

1. Birth Certificate: the Lord God has given me a new nature (2 Corinthians 5:17). There is in me a new man, created of God in righteousness and true holiness.

2. Visa: I have a right to enter into heaven itself by the blood of Christ, because I am robed in his righteousness. God says, “It must be perfect to be accepted”, and in Christ I am perfect! He has made me perfectly righteous before God!

3. Clear Record: Jesus Christ has purged away all my sins with his own precious blood. Therefore, God will never charge me with any sin (Romans 4:8). When I stand before God and he searches the books for iniquity and sin under my name, he will find none (Jeremiah 50:20).

Do you have what God requires? Are you worthy to obtain the world to come? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall obtain in him all that God requires to make you worthy of heavenly glory!

The Resurrection Life
Our Saviour not only assures us of the resurrection, but also gives us a slight glimpse of what life shall be like in the resurrection glory awaiting us.

“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” (vv. 34-36).

There will be a resurrection of the dead. When our Lord Jesus comes again, there will be a resurrection of the just and of the unjust. This fact is inscribed upon every man’s heart and conscience by the finger of God in creation. Anyone who denies the resurrection is a liar. He lies against his own conscience. This doctrine of the resurrection is the doctrine of both the Old and New Testaments (Exodus 3:6; Job 19:25, 26; Psalms 16:9, 10; 49:15; 73:24; Hosea 6:1, 2; Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; 1 Corinthians 15:35-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

In the resurrection God’s saints shall be as the angels of God. In the resurrection we “shall be equal unto the angels”. What does that mean? I am certain that it contains a depth of meaning far greater than I have yet fathomed. But I am equally certain that it means these things.

In the resurrection we will be completely free of all carnal distinctions, weaknesses, cares, needs, and passions.

In the resurrection there will be no need for marriage and procreation, because there will be no more sickness, sorrow, bereavement or death! “Neither can they die any more”! “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power”! And there will be no imperfection of love and unity among God’s saints.

And in the resurrection we will, like the angels of God, possess the constant, full knowledge and assurance of God’s approval. We will enjoy uninterrupted assurance of complete security with Christ. We will have perfect, uninterrupted communion with our Redeemer. Like the heavenly angels, we will always be engaged in the suitable, gratifying service of our great God. Worshipping him! Singing his praise! Celebrating his wondrous works! Doing his will! We will have unbroken, everlasting rest! Like those celestial spirits above, we will gaze
upon our God and Saviour. “They do always behold the face of God.” “They shall see his face”! “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psalm 17:15).

**He Who Is Our God Is The God Of The Living.**

“Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed 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” (vv. 37, 38).

Again, there is much more here than I can explain; but certain things are clear. It is certain that God’s saints who have left this world are not dead, but living. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob represent all God’s elect. They were chosen of God. They were heirs of a covenant. They believed God. They lived in communion with God. But they did not fully enjoy the fulfilment of God’s promises until they left this vale of tears (Hebrews 11:13-16). God’s glory was wrapped up in their lives. “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” “God is not ashamed to be called their God.”

**The Word Of God**

Every time I read verse 37 I think to myself, “What a vast, immense Book the Word of God is”! The more I study it, the bigger it gets. This is a Book altogether beyond the reach of our puny brains. When we have studied it as deeply and as fully as possible, when we have taken in and comprehended everything that it is possible for us to take in and comprehend in this mortal frame, we will have only begun to scratch the surface. We will be learning the secrets of “the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever” throughout the endless ages of eternity.

Let me show you what I mean. The passage our Lord quotes in verse 37 is Exodus 3:6. “Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God
of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.” Who would ever have dreamed that this passage of scripture has anything to do with the resurrection, if the Son of God himself had not stated it? No one in history ever gave God’s word to Moses such an interpretation, until the Lord Jesus explained it in our text. Someone once wrote …

“The Bible is the Word of the living God; each letter was penned with an almighty finger; each word came from the everlasting lips; each sentence was dictated by the Holy Spirit. Moses wrote with his fiery pen; God guided that pen. David played and sang the sweet psalms, but God moved his fingers over the strings and taught him the words. When Peter, James, and John tell of their Lord’s life, death, and resurrection, it is the voice of God, not a man’s voice. The very words are God’s words, the words of the Eternal, the Invisible, the Almighty Jehovah. The Bible is God’s Word; and when I see it, I seem to hear a voice springing up from it saying, ‘I am the book of God; man, READ ME! I am God’s writing, open my pages, for I was written by God; he is my author and you will find him manifested on every page.’”

Read the Book of God; and as you read it, pray that God the Holy Spirit, who wrote it, will take the things of Christ in it and reveal them to you. Oh, what great, boundless, free, indescribable grace the Lord God has bestowed upon us in Christ, making us in him to be “the children of God”, “the children of the resurrection”, and “accounted worthy to obtain that world”! “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple” (Psalm 27:4).
Chapter 36

“Then certain of the scribes answering said, Master, thou hast well said. And after that they durst not ask him any question at all. And he said unto them, How say they that Christ is David’s son? 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? 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” (Luke 20:39-47).

David’s Son And David’s Lord

The Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees took great offence at our Lord’s doctrine, rightly perceiving that he had spoken the parable of the vineyard (vv. 9-18) against them (v. 19). Taking offence at his doctrine, these wicked religious men, like their successors in every generation since, tried to catch the Lord Jesus with trick questions, hoping to twist his words and turn them against him, all the while pretending to be sincere and honest. But they were altogether foiled in their schemes, as those who oppose Christ and his gospel always are.

Once our Lord Jesus had stopped the mouths of the Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, he seized the opportunity to give us a
word of instruction about himself and a word of warning about religious pretence. The Scribes, who believed the doctrine of the resurrection, which the Sadducees denied, were pleased enough with the Lord’s response to the Sadducees. But they no more believed God than the Sadducees or the Pharisees. All three groups were mere self-righteous religionists, who utterly despised Christ and salvation by him. Our Lord saw through their charade. He was no more impressed with one than with the other.

A Galling Exposure
First, our Lord Jesus publicly exposed the ignorance of these religious hypocrites. After enduring and silencing the cavils of his enemies, our Lord turned the table against them and deliberately exposed their utter ignorance of the scriptures and the power of God. Remember, these were not ordinary men, or even ordinary religious men. They were the most revered religious leaders of their day. But they were, as are the most revered religious leaders of every age, ignorant of the scriptures and ignorant of the power of God. Can you imagine how galling it must have been to them to have their ignorance publicly exposed before the multitudes? Yet, that is exactly what the Lord Jesus did here.

He asked them to explain an expression found in Psalm 110, where David speaks of the Messiah, whom they all acknowledged is David’s son, as his Lord. They were dumbfounded. They were so stunned that they could not give any kind of answer. These great religious leaders did not see the plain teaching of holy scripture that Messiah (the Christ), he who is our Redeemer and Saviour, must be and is fully God and fully man in one glorious Person. Yet, that is exactly what the Psalmist David declares in Psalm 110. Their ignorance of this Psalm was exposed before all the people. Professing themselves to be teachers of others, claiming to possess the key of
knowledge, they were totally ignorant of the scriptures they claimed to teach with authority. Nothing could have been more embarrassing and galling.

The Message Of Scripture
Second, the Lord Jesus here reminds us that the Book of God is all about him, his person, his work, his salvation, and his great glory in saving his people from their sins. I remind you again that the Bible is all about Christ. There is a unique fulness about the Word of God that gives clear evidence of its inspiration. The more we read and study it, the bigger it gets and the more it seems to contain. All other books become mundane, if they are repeatedly read. Their weak points become obvious. After a while, they all get old. But the Book of God just gets more fresh. It appears to be broader, deeper, and fuller the more fully it is studied. The fresh truths that constantly spring up before our eyes are simple, plain, and clear. The Book of God is an inexhaustible mine of spiritual treasure. Nothing can explain this, except the fact that the Bible is the Word, not of man, but of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:21).

Yet, throughout the Bible, there is but one theme, one message. The theme and message of this Book is Jesus Christ and him crucified, redemption and salvation by his blood (Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; Acts 20:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 2:2).

8 The perfect harmony and unity of the Bible is simply an unanswerable argument for its divine origin and a great source of comfort and assurance for our faith. If I should see my great-grandfather, who has been dead since I was a boy, rise up out of the earth, that fact would be less miraculous than the existence of God's Word. The Bible was written in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), by some forty different authors, who lived on two separate continents, over a period of more than sixteen hundred years. Parts of it were written in palaces, parts in prisons. Some of it was written by well educated men in great cities, other parts were written by shepherds and fishermen. Parts of it were written during times of war, pestilence, and danger, other parts during times of ecstatic joy. Those who wrote the words of holy scripture were from virtually every walk of life: judges, priests, kings, prophets, prime-ministers, herdsmen, scribes, fishermen, and soldiers. Yet, in spite of all these varying circumstances, conditions, workmen, and ages of time employed in the production of the Book, it stands as one Book. It is perfectly one in all its parts, free of error, and free of contradiction.
The Psalms
We see this fact demonstrated throughout the scriptures. This Book speaks of him whom to know is life eternal. As we open the Word of God, let us pray that God the Holy Spirit, whose Word it is, will open our hearts and minds to see the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Psalms, to which our Lord here refers us, are full of him. No part of the Bible perhaps is better known in the letter, and none so little understood in the spirit, as the Book of Psalms. That was true in our Lord’s day; and the same is true today. Most everyone who attends church knows something about the Psalms. In some churches a psalm is sung every week. Some sing the Psalms exclusively. Yet, there are few who understand that the Psalms speak of Christ.

Most everyone acknowledges that some of the Psalms are messianic, that they have some reference to Christ. But few understand that all the Psalms speak of him, as he declared in Luke 24 that they do. Yes, they record feelings, experiences, praises, and prayers of the men who wrote them; but we have not understood the Psalms at all, if we do not see that they all point us to and teach us about our Saviour.

The Book of Psalms is, in a word, a book full of Christ. Christ’s coming, Christ’s sufferings, Christ in humiliation, Christ dying, Christ rising again, Christ coming the second time, Christ reigning over all. The Psalms speak of both our Lord’s

Imagine forty persons of different nationalities, possessing various degrees of musical culture, visiting the organ of some great cathedral and at long intervals of time, and without any collusion whatever, striking sixty-six different notes, which when combined yielded the theme of the grandest oratorio ever heard; would it not show that behind these forty different men there was one presiding mind, one great Tone-Master? As we listen to some great orchestra, with its immense variety of instruments playing their different parts, but producing melody and harmony, we realize that at the back of these many musicians there is the personality and genius of the composer. And when we enter the halls of the Divine Academy and listen to the heavenly choirs singing the Song of Redemption, all in perfect accord and unison, we know that it is God himself who has written the music and put this song into their mouths. A. W. Pink
great advents, the advent of humiliation, when he appeared to be made sin for us and to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself and the advent of his glory, when he shall appear the second time without sin to gather his people home to glory. Both the kingdoms are here: the kingdom of grace, during which the elect are gathered, and the kingdom of glory, when every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord.

We read the Word of God with no profit to our souls, if we read only the letter of the written Word and fail to see the person, the character, the accomplishments, the grace, the greatness, and the glory of Christ the living Word, of whom the written Word speaks.

**Christ’s Enthronement**

Third, the Lord Jesus declares his eternal enthronement and dominion as the God-man, our Mediator.

“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” (vv. 42, 43).

Did David say precisely that? Did he actually declare that the Lord Jesus Christ was already enthroned as our Mediator? Indeed, he did. But Christ’s enthronement as our Mediator and Priest is the reward of his accomplished redemption. Is it not (Psalm 2:8; John 17:1-5; Philippians 2:5-11; Romans 14:9)? So how could he have been already enthroned, if he had not yet fully accomplished his work of redemption, if he had not yet fully saved his people? He was already enthroned because as the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, his work was accomplished and our salvation was finished before the world began.

Read Psalm 110 again. Carefully note that which the Holy Spirit, back in David’s day asserted emphatically that Christ was already enthroned because his great salvation was finished long before he came into the world in time. In fact, this is exactly
what Isaiah saw and experienced in Isaiah 6. The Lord Jesus Christ, as our Mediator, was given the reins of universal dominion privately before the world began (John 17:5). He was given those reins publicly at his ascension. He holds those reins now, and shall hold them forever. The triune God has put all things into the hands of Christ, the God-man, our Redeemer. And he shall reign forever! Soon, all his enemies shall be (either by saving grace or by the execution of wrath) put under his feet (Isaiah 45:22-25; 1 Corinthians 15:24, 25).

The God-man
In verse 44 our Saviour, speaking of himself, asked these “brilliant”, religious idiots, “David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?” They were dumbfounded by the question. Yet, it is a question that is easily and quickly answered by the poorest, most unlearned sinner saved by God’s free grace (John 1:14-18; 1 Timothy 3:16). How truly blessed we are, being taught of God, to know and be assured of this great mystery. Our great Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, is both the “Root” and the “Offspring” of David. Being God the eternal Son, one with the Father, over all God blessed forever, he is, and must be God: David’s Root, and the Maker of all things. And as man he is the Offspring, which as a Branch, was promised to grow out of his roots (Isaiah 11:1).

Precious Saviour! Blessed Redeemer! Were you not both David’s Son and David’s Lord, what would have become of us? But because you, O Blessed Son of God, became a man like us, that you might live and die and live again to save us, eternal life is ours by the merit and efficacy of your righteousness and blood! The righteousness brought in by the obedience of the God-man is the righteousness of God (Romans 10:1-4). The blood shed for the atonement of sin is the blood of that Man who is himself God (Acts 20:28). And it is this Christ, the God-man our Mediator and Saviour, who is, who was, and who shall be
forever our Priest upon his throne, our King, Priest and Advocate, made after the order of Melchizedek! How safe we are! How secure! How peaceful and confident we ought to be!

**A Timeless Warning**

Fourth, our Redeemer again warns us to beware of all who make a show of religion and godliness.

“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 show make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.”

This was an open, public rebuke of men who “sat in Moses’ seat”, and were the recognized and revered religious leaders of people. It seems that no sin is more obnoxious to the Son of God than hypocrisy and a show of religion. None drew forth from his lips such frequent, strong, and withering condemnation during the whole course of his earthly ministry. Our Saviour is ever full of mercy and compassion for the chief of sinners. Fury was not in him when he saw Zacchaeus, the penitent thief, Matthew the tax-collector, Saul the persecutor, and the woman in Simon’s house. But when he saw scribes and Pharisees wearing a mere cloak of religion, and pretending great outward sanctity, piety, and holiness, while their hearts were full of wickedness, his holy soul was full of indignation. Eight times in one chapter (Matthew 23) we find him saying, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites”!

And he has not changed. He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Whatever else we are in religion, let us be true. However feeble our faith, hope, love, and obedience may be, let us be real, genuine, and sincere. It is not accidental that the very first piece of armour Paul recommends to the Christian soldier is “truth”. “Stand therefore”, he says, “having your loins
girt about with truth” (Ephesians 6:14).

Anyone who attempts, in any way, to show his religion, devotion, piety, sanctity, and holiness to others, truly does; and he has his reward. His religion, devotion, piety, sanctity, and holiness is all outward; and the applause of men is all it is worth. God’s saints seek not the praise of men, but the praise of God.

**Degrees Of Torment**

Fifth, we are taught that there are degrees of damnation in hell. Our Saviour’s last word in this instructive chapter is a word about the greater condemnation of self-righteous religionists. “The same shall receive greater damnation.”

There are no degrees of glory in heaven, because salvation is by the grace of God alone. Heaven’s glory was earned for all God’s elect; and we are made worthy of it by Christ’s obedience and death as our Substitute. But there are degrees of damnation in hell. The everlasting torments of the damned in hell are measured out and executed by divine justice according to the measure of man’s wickedness.

Do not read these solemn words and forget them. They are spoken to lost religious men. Do not be so proud. Do not be so foolish. Oh, may God the Holy Spirit give you grace now to look to Christ, to believe him. There is a Fountain opened for sinners; but there is nothing but everlasting damnation in hell for those who think they are righteous. O sinner, plunge into that Fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel’s veins. Sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains!
Chapter 37

“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. 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: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had. 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. 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? And he said, 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. 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. 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 signs shall there be from heaven. 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 ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish. 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. 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. 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” (Luke 21:1-24).

Lessons For Troublesome Times

We are living in troublesome times. These are perilous days. These are difficult days for everyone. But they are particularly difficult for people who believe God and seek, in all things and above all things, to honour him. I know that your minds are constantly full of questions, for which there seems to be no answer. Moral decadence, fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and the paedophilia that it spawns are not just tolerated, but actively promoted in our public schools and by law. The brutal slaughter of unborn babies is as common as the removal of warts. By some perverse logic, the same people who want to protect rattlesnakes from extinction and weep over the misuse of laboratory rats, tell us that the murder of a baby is a matter of choice! Domestic violence is epidemic. War is an everyday activity. And the religion of the day is nothing short of men
worshipping themselves. When I think about these things, three passages of scripture come to my mind (Deuteronomy 31:17; Psalm 10:4; Galatians 6:7).

“Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?” (Deuteronomy 31:17).

“The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts” (Psalm 10:4).

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

How do we deal with these things? How are we to react to the things going on around us every day? Where are we to find help for our souls in these perilous times? In the first 24 verses of Luke 21 our blessed Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, gives us some needed lessons for troublesome times. Let us look at them together.

**Christ Sees All**

Here is the first lesson. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, he with whom we have to do, sees all and knows all.

“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. 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: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had” (Luke 21:1-4).

How keenly our Lord Jesus Christ observes the things that are done upon earth. We read that “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.”
It would seem reasonable to me that our Lord’s mind would have been on other things. His betrayal, his unjust arrest, his mock trial, his crucifixion, his sufferings, and his death, were all at hand; and he knew it. The destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, and the casting away of Israel, the long period of this gospel age, “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled”, and his glorious second advent were all spread before his mind like a great picture. Yet, he took notice of “the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.”

Truly, he sees all and knows all. “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” (Hebrews 4:13). “The eyes of the Lord are in every place” (Proverbs 15:3). Nothing escapes his observation. Every act and thought of every person is written down in the book of his remembrance. The same eye that sees the council-chambers of the mighty observes all that goes on in your house and mine. He observed the pompous show of these rich men. And he observed the great sacrifice of the poor widow. He observed not only what they did, but also why.

Yes, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, he with whom we have to do, sees all and knows all! To religious hypocrites, that fact is terrifying, and ought to be. To the believer, it is blessedly comforting (John 21:17).

Marked For Destruction

Here is the second lesson. Everything on this earth is marked for destruction.

“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” (Luke 21:5, 6).
These words were a striking prophecy. How strange and startling they must have sounded to those who heard them. The temple at Jerusalem was utterly destroyed just a few years after these words were spoken. Soon, all earthly buildings and all earthly things, no matter how firm they appear to be, no matter how much they are prized and treasured by us, shall melt with a fervent heat and be destroyed. Hold nothing here with a firm hand. Value nothing on this earth more than you will value it when you die (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:9).

Our Lord was talking about the temple of God. It was a fabulous piece of architecture. To the Jews, the thought of it being destroyed was incomprehensible. They looked upon that building with idolatrous veneration. It was built according to the pattern given by God himself. David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Nehemiah were the venerated names associated with that building. Every devout Jew in every corner of the world prayed toward the temple daily.

But the temple was to be destroyed by the hand of God. The temple at Jerusalem, though once the place of God’s manifest glory, though once the place where God met with men, though once the place where men and women drew near to and worshipped the triune God, had become an empty shell, a den of thieves, and a synagogue of Satan. That which was once the house of God had become the brothel of Babylon, and must be destroyed. So it shall be with every local church, every form of religion, and every person who abandons the gospel of Christ and the worship of God. When Babylon falls, all who sleep in her bed shall fall with her. When the world is ablate with Divine judgment, all false religion shall be burned as wood, hay, and stubble.

The true temple of God is not a building, or a system of religion, but the broken and contrite heart of poor sinners trusting his Son (John 4:23, 24; Philippians 3:3).
False Christs

“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? And he said, 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” (Luke 21:7, 8).

Everyone wants to know when the end of the world will be, when Christ shall come again, and when the great Day of Judgment shall come. But our Lord Jesus completely passes over the questions asked in verse seven, because all such questions are totally unimportant. They are questions to which no answer can be found, because God has hidden the answer. Our Master refused to indulge their vain curiosity about prophecy. We would be wise to do the same.

Instead, he addressed himself to a matter that ought to be of great concern to us all. Here is the third lesson. Many false christs are in the world, by whom multitudes are deceived. I am not interested in the many men who appeared in the years following our Lord’s crucifixion who claimed to be the Christ. They are of no danger to us today. But there are many false christs being preached in the name of the true, just as there were in the days of the Apostles (2 Corinthians 11:3, 4; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 John 4:1-3). Of these false christs, we must beware.

I urge you to give earnest heed to the words of the Son of God.

“Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many ... For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened. 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 show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matthew 24:4, 5, 21-24).

The plain fact is there are many false christs, many antichrists, by whom the souls of men are deceived and damned. I want to be as charitable, kind, and gracious as I can; but charity, kindness, and grace will not allow me to be silent while immortal souls are deceived and God’s glory is trampled beneath the feet of men. If you trust a false christ, you cannot be saved any more than you could be saved by trusting a tadpole. We are called of God to trust, love, follow, and obey the true Christ and him only. Salvation is promised to none but those who trust the true Christ. Therefore, we are warned in our text to “Take heed that no man deceive you.” We must take heed to the teachings of holy scripture, lest we be deceived by some false christ.

We know about the christ of the liberals. He was a social do-gooder. “Of course”, we are told, “he is not God.” The virgin birth, the incarnation, the resurrection are all things that must be understood allegorically. In fact, the Christ of the liberals is considered by many to be a man of very questionable moral character. Any who are deceived by liberal theology and the christ of the liberals are willingly deceived. We are not deceived by the christ of the liberals. Only a prating fool would pretend to be a Christian while teaching what liberals do concerning Christ. The christ of the liberals is a false christ. All who trust the christ of the liberals are lost.

We also know about the christ of the various cults. He is represented to us as a good man, a prophet, a teacher of morality, the first and greatest creation of God, or even a sort of secondary god. But the christ of the cults is never represented as the true and eternal God. Their christ receives his existence from another god, one who is greater than he is. This, of course, is not
the Christ of the Bible. We are not deceived by him. The christ of the cults is a false christ. All who trust the christ of the cults are lost.

We know about the christ of Roman Catholicism. The papists profess that Jesus Christ is God, that he came into the world as a man, that he suffered the wrath of God as a substitute for sinners, that he died, was buried, rose again the third day, ascended back to heaven, and that he is coming again. But the christ of Romanism is not a complete Saviour. The christ of Rome cannot save sinners without their own good works, the intercessions of priests, and the sacraments of the church. The christ of Rome is not the Christ of the Bible. We are not deceived by him. Though many are damned by the darkness of Roman Catholic idolatry, that is not a danger and deception by which any who read these lines are likely to be deceived. The christ of the papists, we know, is a false christ. All who trust the christ of Rome are lost.

However, there is a false christ much more dangerous than the antichrists of the liberals, the cults, and the papists. There is a false christ by whom the souls of men have been deceived for years, by whom millions are being deceived today. In fact, I am compelled to say, the vast majority of those who profess faith in Christ are followers of this false christ who will ultimately lead them to eternal ruin. This christ, this antichrist is such a dangerous and deceptive christ, that our Lord tells us he would deceive the very elect were it not impossible for God’s elect to be deceived (Matthew 24:24). He must be identified. The christ I speak of is the christ of Arminian, freewill, works religion.

Few think that I am uncharitable when I denounce the false christs of liberals, cults, and papists as antichrists, and warn men that following those false christs will result in everlasting damnation. Yet, whenever I assert that the christ of Arminian, freewill, works religion is a false christ and that all who trust him are lost, I am castigated as an evil man. Be that as it may, as
a watchman upon the walls of Zion, I am responsible to warn you of the danger of this antichrist.

The christ of Arminian, freewill, works religion is extremely dangerous, because in many ways he appears to be the true Christ. The freewillers and workmongers of this age tell us that Christ is the true God, in every way equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. They even assert that he saves by grace alone, without the works of man. They insist vehemently that good works play no part in their salvation. The devotees of this christ will have nothing to do with the christ of the liberals, the cults, or the papists. But “take heed that no man deceive you”! Do not be fooled. The christ of Arminian, freewill, works religion is not the Christ of the Bible. He is a false christ. All who trust this false christ are lost, too.

Be sure you understand the issue. The issue is not what or how much does a person have to know to be saved. The issue is who. Who must I know? The answer to that question is plainly stated in John 17:3. We must know the true God and the true Christ. Let me make five comparisons of the false christ of modern religion, the christ of Arminian, freewill, works religion, with the Christ of the Bible. When you have considered these five comparisons in the light of holy scripture, I have no doubt that you will see the obvious distinctions between the false christs and the true.

1. The christ of modern, freewill, works religion loves everyone in the universe and wants to save them.

We are told that Christ loves all men alike, desires the salvation of all men alike, and is gracious to all men alike. That makes the love, will, and grace of Christ helpless and useless. However, that language cannot be applied to the Christ of the Bible. The true Christ, the Christ of the Bible, the saving Christ loves his people, wills and prays for the salvation of his people, and is gracious to his people, the people unconditionally chosen unto salvation from eternity, whom he came to save (Psalms 5:5;
2. The Christ of modern, freewill, works religion tries to save everyone.

We are told that he offers salvation to every sinner and does everything he can to save them all; but that his offer is rejected and his work is frustrated by the will of those who refuse to come to him and be saved. The Christ of the Bible does not merely offer salvation. He performs it! Grace is not an offer. It is an operation! The Son of God effectually calls to himself all his elect, his sheep, and sovereignly works salvation in them by the irresistible power and grace of his Holy Spirit. Not one of them will be lost. Is this, or is it not the teaching of holy scripture? (Psalms 65:4; 110:3; Isaiah 55:11; John 5:21; 6:37-40; 10:3, 25-30; 17:2; Philippians 2:13)

3. The false Christ of Arminianism cannot regenerate and save anyone who does not first choose to be saved by him.

We are told that man has a freewill, but that Christ’s will is bound by and must wait upon man’s will, because it would not be right for him to violate man’s will! The true, saving Christ does violate man’s imaginary freewill; and I am very thankful that he does. Had he not violated my freewill, I would be lost or in hell now! The same is true of you. He sovereignly regenerates and saves every chosen, redeemed sinner. His operations of grace are totally independent of the will and choice of the sinner. Apart from his work of grace in us, spiritually dead sinners never would or could believe on him and come to him in faith. Faith is not our contribution to the work of salvation. Our faith in Christ is the result, not the cause of God’s saving operations. “Let God be true, but every man a liar” (John 3:3-7; 6:44, 65; 15:16; Acts 11:18; Romans 2:4; 9:16; Ephesians 2:1-4, 8-10; Philippians 1:6, 29; Colossians 2:12; Hebrews 12:2).

4. The false Christ of modern, Arminian, freewill, works, man-centred religion died on the cross for everyone in the
world, to make it possible for everyone in the world to be saved, but actually secured no one’s salvation by his death.

We are told that Christ by his death made it possible for all men to be redeemed, justified, and saved, but that his death has no efficacy and saving power for anyone until they believe on him. Thus, we are informed that the Son of God died in vain for all who perish in unbelief. Though he tried to save them, he failed! The Christ of God is not a frustrated failure! He died for God’s elect and effectually put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself. Having satisfied the justice of God for us, he obtained eternal salvation for us. We were and are forever pardoned, justified, and sanctified by his blood (Isaiah 42:4; 53:8; Matthew 20:28; John 10:14, 15, 26; Acts 20:28; Romans 5:9, 10; Ephesians 5:25; Hebrews 9:12; 10:10-14; 1 Peter 3:18; Revelation 5:9, 10).

5. The false christ of Arminianism loses many who have been saved by him because they do not hang on, hold out, or persevere to the end.

Among the heretical Baptists of our day, some do grant that the sinner has what has come to be called “eternal security”. But it is not security based upon the will, work, and purpose of God in Christ. It is not security based upon the blood of Christ, or the operations of his Spirit. According to the freewiller, all these things are done for all people alike. So their doctrine of “eternal security” is a declaration of security based upon the choice and will of man, not the choice and will of God. The true Christ, the saving Christ, the Christ of the Bible preserves his chosen, redeemed, called ones by his almighty grace, so that they cannot fall away and perish at last. We are kept in life, grace, and faith by the immutability of his will, the power of his blood, the efficacy of his grace, the seal of his Spirit, and the perfection of his intercession (Malachi 3:6; John 5:24; 10:27-29; Romans 8:28-39; 1 Peter 1:2-5; Jude 24, 25).

At first glance, the christ of modern, Arminian, freewill,
works religion may seem to closely resemble the true Christ, the Christ of Scripture; but he does not. The one is a false christ, antichrist. The other is true, the Christ of God. One is weak and helpless, waiting upon and bowing to the will of man. The other is the sovereign Lord, Who wills what he pleases and does what he will! The one is supposed to be able to save with your cooperation. The other is able to save without any cooperation on your part. His salvation produces your cooperation!

Those who believe on and serve the false christ of freewill, works religion do not believe on and serve the Christ of the Bible. They are deceived. They are lost. And they shall forever perish under the wrath of God, unless they come to know and trust the Christ of God, who saves his people from their sins by himself. We must, as we fear God and care for the souls of men, have no fellowship with and give no credibility to Arminian, freewill, works religion (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Revelation 18:4). We must, in these days of darkness, deception, and delusion, proclaim the Christ of God in all his saving fulness, grace, and glory. He alone is able to save (Romans 1:15-17). Let us ever adore, praise, and extol the Lord Jesus Christ, alone and completely, as our great Saviour (Isaiah 59:16)

By And By
Here is the fourth lesson. The Lord Jesus will appear when it’s time, as he puts it in verse 9, “by and by”.

“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” (Luke 21:9).

We are to watch and look for him to come at any moment. Expect him to appear, and to appear soon. Yet, we must never begin to think the time of the end is immediately at hand. We are to watch for him with anxious, hopeful expectation, on the tiptoe of faith. Yet, we are to patiently wait for him, serving him with diligence and perseverance, with an eye to the generation before
us and to the future generations that may be influenced by us.

Troubles Sure
Here is the fifth lesson. Until Christ returns, troubles are sure and will only increase, troubles in the world and persecutions against the gospel and all who worship and faithfully serve the Lord Jesus.

“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 signs shall there be from heaven. 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” (Luke 21:10-12).

“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29).

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye 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 that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Peter 2:21-25).

Confess Christ
Here is the sixth lesson. Times of great trouble are times of great opportunity to confess Christ.

“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 ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist” (Luke 21:12-15).

All these things, our Saviour says, “shall turn to you for a testimony”. They supply us with great opportunity to confess him before men, to proclaim to this wicked and perverse generation the glorious gospel of God’s free, saving grace in Christ.

And we are not left to come up with something to say. He has in his Word given us the “mouth and wisdom” needed for the hour in which we live; and that “mouth and wisdom” is the gospel. Let us settle it in our hearts that we will speak Christ’s gospel in the day he has given us. The gospel we preach, the grace of which we testify, our adversaries can neither “gainsay nor resist”, “for the Word of God is not bound”.

Perfectly Safe

Here is the seventh lesson. Though we may be betrayed, hated, persecuted, and sometimes even put to death, for Christ’s sake, God’s saints are always perfectly safe in his omnipotent hands, and shall never suffer any harm or injury of any kind. “And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish” (Luke 21:16-18). It is written, “There shall no evil happen to the just.” “It shall be well with the righteous.”

“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. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:5, 6).
Patient Possessing

“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. 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. 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” (Luke 21:19-24).

Here is the eighth lesson in our text. Our Lord Jesus teaches us, in the midst of troublesome times, “In your patience possess ye your souls.” Child of God, enjoy yourself, and enjoy your God and Saviour. Let nothing disturb or distress you. You possess that peace and joy in your souls which the world cannot take away (Romans 5:3-5). And he tells us that we are to possess our souls in this patience of grace and faith and peace until all his elect have been gathered into his kingdom, “until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Romans 11:25-27).

William Cowper wrote these encouraging and comforting words:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up his bright designs
And works his sovereign will.
Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err  
And scan his work in vain;  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain.
Chapter 38

“And there shall be signs in the sun, 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 hearts 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 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. 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, and so that day come upon you unawares. 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. And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him” (Luke 21:25-38).

“Men’s Hearts Failing Them”
I am fully aware that these verses speak specifically of our Lord’s coming to destroy Jerusalem and Judaism when he sent the armies of Rome to destroy that city and its temple in 70 AD. Our Saviour’s words in verse 32 make that crystal clear. “This generation (the generation then living) shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled.” But that does not mean that they have no meaning for us today. Everything recorded in this passage of Inspiration is written for our “learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). Without question, all that we read here is to be properly applied to this day in which we look for “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour”, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Historians tell us that the early saints used to greet one another with these words, “He is risen.”, and upon parting they would say, “The Lord is coming.” Thus they constantly encouraged one another in the faith and constantly reminded one another of both the accomplishment of redemption by Christ and the certainty of resurrection glory with Christ.

Before he left this world, our Lord Jesus assured his disciples that, just as surely as he arose from the grave, he would come again to raise his saints from their graves and translate all his elect in resurrection glory to heaven. Let us ever rejoice in the blessed prospect of our Saviour’s return. The Lord is coming (Revelation 1:7). I want, by the Spirit of God, to stir up your hearts and my own to ever be mindful of this fact: The Lord is coming! May God give us grace ever to live in the blessed expectation of Christ’s glorious second advent. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming again.

**The Glory Of Christ’s Coming**

“And there shall be signs in the sun, 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 hearts 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 the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (vv. 25-27).

Our Saviour begins this discourse by describing the time of his coming as a time of great fear, so great that men’s hearts will fail them. I do not know that this is the case, but if that is to be taken as a description of the days just before Christ returns, surely we may reasonably conclude that our “redemption draweth nigh”!

In Hebrews 9 the Holy Spirit tells us three things about our blessed Saviour: (1.) The Son of God appeared once to put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself (vv. 25, 26). (2.) Our great Advocate and High Priest now appears in the presence of God for us, making intercession for his elect according to the will of God (v. 24; 1 John 2:1, 2). And (3.) our great God and Saviour shall, at the appointed time, appear again on this earth to consummate his great work of saving his people from their sins (vv. 27, 28).

As our Saviour describes his second advent in his Olivet discourse in our text, it is obvious that when he comes again, it will not be a secret thing. At his glorious second advent, he will appear with power and great glory. “There shall be signs in the sun, 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 hearts 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 the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.” That is the language of holy scripture. Christ’s second coming shall not be in some imaginary “secret rapture”. His shall be a glorious appearing (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 1:7).

The Lord Jesus speaks about the sun being turned into
darkness, the moon refusing to give light, the falling of stars, and the shaking of powers in the heavens. Such language conveys the idea of a great, universal convulsion, a climactic dismantling of creation by the finger of God. The language he uses is very much the language Peter used to describe his coming (2 Peter 3:10).

In other words, that which shall immediately precede the glorious appearing of Christ will be the conflagration of the universe. Without question, when that happens we will see, “Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.”

**Order Of Events**
The order of events at the second coming seems to be as follows. These things are not written in concrete. I would not argue in defence of them for even a second. However, this is what appears to me to be likely. I have formed this order by carefully comparing scripture with scripture. Whatever the order of events may indeed be, it will not take long to accomplish the whole thing. When the Son of God rises from his throne and says, “Behold, I make all things new”, it will all be done quickly.

Christ will come in the clouds of heaven.
He will raise up those bodies of his saints which sleep in the earth.
Those then living in faith will be caught up to meet him in the air.
He will destroy this creation with all his enemies, and make all things new.
We shall come with him to the earth. We shall come with him into a new heavens and a new earth.
Then will come the resurrection of the dead and the great white throne judgment.
After these things eternal life with Christ!

Our Lord’s second advent will be radically different from his first. Our Saviour came the first time in humiliation, an infant, born of a poor woman, laid in a manger at Bethlehem, unnoticed, unhonoured, unknown. He is coming the second time in power and great glory, in royal dignity, with all the armies of heaven surrounding him, to be seen, recognized, known, acknowledged and feared by all people, nations, tribes, and tongues.

Christ Jesus came the first time to suffer, to bear the sins of his people, to be made sin and made a curse, to be despised, rejected, unjustly condemned, and slain. He is coming the second time as the reigning, almighty Monarch of the universe to put down every foe, put an end to all rebellion, to take possession of all the kingdoms of this world, to rule them in perfect righteousness, to judge the world, destroy his enemies, and to be eternally admired by redeemed sinners.

We would all be wise to lay these things to heart and meditate upon them regularly. These facts are filled with comfort for every believer. Our great King, our all glorious Christ, will soon be here again! We shall, with him, inherit all things. We will soon exchange the cross for a crown. We shall enter into everlasting honour, joy, bliss, and life.

But, for you who believe not, the facts revealed in the Book of God about the second coming of Christ ought to be terrifying. Indeed, if you dare think upon them, I know, they are terrifying to your soul. Christ, whom you despise, reject, and mock, will soon call you before his holy bar of judgment. That God-man, whose gospel you daily trample beneath your feet, will soon hold you accountable. In that day, you shall receive of the Lord’s hand your exact, just due for all your sins. Hell will be your everlasting portion!

Do you ask, “What is hell?” Everlasting fire! Endless

**The Gathering Of God’s Elect**

In verse twenty-eight our Master tells us plainly that the first order of business and the primary purpose of his great second advent shall be the gathering of his elect. Throughout the Word of God we are distinctly and constantly taught that our God does all things for the elect’s sake. “And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” Mark puts it in these words: “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” (Mark 13:27).

Just as God’s servants, as the angels of God, are sent out to gather his elect into his kingdom from the four corners of the earth by the preaching of the gospel, so at the end of time those heavenly spirits created to minister to the chosen shall be sent forth to fetch them out of the earth and gather them, all of them, even their dust and ashes unto Christ in glory! As the angels carried Lazarus into Abraham’s bosom, so they shall carry all God’s elect into heaven’s bosom to be with Christ!

I stated before that the gathering out of God’s elect will immediately precede the Lord’s judgment upon the earth. Our safety shall be taken care of when the Lord consumes the earth with the fiery brightness of his coming. Nothing shall be done to destroy the earth until God’s elect are beyond the reach of harm (2 Peter 3:9). Not one drop of rain fell until Noah was safe in the ark. Fire and brimstone could not fall upon Sodom until Lot was safely secluded in Zoar. And God’s wrath will not consume his enemies in the earth until he has taken his saints out of the earth.

Blessed be our God, there is a great gathering day coming!
We who believe ought to look forward to that great day with unmingled joy, without the slightest dread or fear (2 Thessalonians 2:1; Titus 2:13). It shall be the gracious gathering of God’s chosen. The elect shall be gathered in righteousness, being made worthy to stand before God by the righteousness of Christ, which is our righteousness (v. 36; Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16; Colossians 1:12).

The Parable Of The Fig Tree

“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” (vv. 29-32).

Our Lord sternly reproved the Pharisees because they could not “discern the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:3). They could not see that the sceptre was passing away from Judah. They did not see that Daniel’s seventy weeks were fulfilled. Let us beware of such blindness. It is a blindness caused by spiritual lethargy and an overmuch fondness for this world.

This parable of the fig tree is not a deep, mysterious, secretive thing. In this parable our Lord tells us plainly that when we see the things spoken of in its context, as Mark relates this discourse (Mark 13:14), when we see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, his glorious second advent is at hand.

The abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel is the revelation (to God’s saints, not to the world) of antichrist (Arminian, freewill, works religion). It is that which Paul speaks of in 2 Thessalonians 2, the loosing of Satan to deceive the nations of the world (Revelation 20:1-8).

The lesson of the parable of the fig tree is just this: while we must never even guess at or try to figure out the time of Christ’s
coming, increasing darkness, ungodliness, apostasy, and idolatry ought to cause every believer to live looking expectantly for Christ’s appearing.

The rising infidelity, increasing acceptance of popery, Islam, Judaism, and mysticism, the worldwide will-worship of this apostate age, the lawlessness, the anarchy, the contempt of authority, the acceptance of sexual promiscuity, (fornication, adultery, homosexuality), and the general calling of evil good and good evil ought to be glaring beacons in our eyes and trumpets in our ears telling us “THIS IS THE END! Judgment has begun. The end is near. The Lord is coming.”

The more we see these things coming to pass the more reason we have to look up in hope. Our redemption draws nigh! We must therefore watch, be sober, and keep our garments white and unspotted from the world (Revelation 16:15). Armageddon is here. The judgment of the great whore is at hand. The Lord is coming!

The Certainty Of God’s Word
In verse 33 our Lord seems to have anticipated our tendency toward scepticism and unbelief and therefore warns us emphatically against it. “Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.”

We must never allow ourselves to give any credibility to any questioning of God’s Word. Let us never dare imagine that any word of prophecy is improbable or unlikely simply because it seems contrary to nature, or experience, or our judgment. Let us never be found among those arrogant fools who imagine that they are smarter than God. We must never find ourselves agreeing with those scoffers who, walking after their own lusts, say, “Where is the promise of his coming?” (2 Peter 3:3, 4).

The People Worthy
Now, look at verses 34-36. Here our Lord Jesus tells us to watch
and pray that we may be found worthy to escape his wrath and stand before the Son of man when he comes to judge the world.

“And 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. 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.”

Let us watch, lest we be corrupted from the simplicity of Christ and engulfed with the corruptions of the religious world around us. Ever watch against freewill/works religion, will worship, self-righteousness, and legalism. Watch against idolatry.

But how can we be counted worthy to escape the wrath of the great Judge, when he comes in his glory to judge the earth? How can we be made worthy to stand before the Son of man in that day? That is altogether the work of his grace. Our worthiness is his blood atonement, his righteousness imputed to us in justification and imparted to us in the new birth! Our worthiness before God is Christ!

Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay,
When, with his righteous garments on,
I am as holy as God’s Own Son?

**God’s Restless Servant**
I cannot fail to call your attention to our Saviour’s constant, faithful devotion to the souls of men, the glory of God, and the preaching of the gospel, as it is described in verses 37, 38.

“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
He never wearied of his labour of love. He never laid aside his commission. Yes, sometimes we find him obliged to sit to rest himself by a well, and sometimes obliged to catch a nap in the day. But, even then, he was resting to meet a woman who needed grace, and was sleeping on his way to save a wild Gadarene. He came here to seek and to save that which was lost, and never gave up the work. Aren’t you glad? I am! It is no marvel that “the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him”!

It is my constant prayer that he who so graciously served and serves my soul will give me the constant supply of his grace that I may serve him in serving his elect for the glory of God, proclaiming the gospel of his grace in this wicked and perverse generation.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things 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 consciences” (2 Corinthians 5:10, 11).

Christ is coming again. You and I are going to meet God in judgment. We are going to spend eternity somewhere, either in the torments of the damned in hell or in the bliss of the redeemed in heaven. Our only hope is Christ. Trust him, and live forever. Child of God, the Lord is coming. REJOICE!
“Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people. 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. 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. 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 guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples? And he shall shew 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” (Luke 22:1-13).

Preparations For The Last Passover

Luke 22 begins Luke’s inspired narrative of our adorable Saviour’s sufferings and death as our Substitute. We now begin to consider the most holy, most profound, and most wondrous
things revealed in the Book of God. Nothing is so sublime, so solemn, and so sweet to the regenerate soul as the sacrifice of Christ. No portion of holy scripture is more important than the things God the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to describe in these last chapters of his gospel narrative. And no part of our Lord’s earthly history is so fully given by all the gospel writers as this. Only Matthew and Luke describe the circumstances of our Redeemer’s birth. But all four gospel writers describe our Saviour’s death minutely. And, of the four, Luke’s account is the most detailed.

In these first thirteen verses Luke sets before us the preparations made by our Lord Jesus for the last observance of the Passover and for the first observance of the Lord’s Supper. It is important that we recognize this fact. Our Saviour here forever abolished the legal, Jewish Passover and established as a perpetual ordinance in his church the observance of the Lord’s Supper. That which he prepared to keep with his disciples was the last Passover ever to be observed by believing men and women. Christ the true Passover was now about to be sacrificed for us. At the same time, our Lord was preparing to observe the Lord’s Supper with his disciples for the first time.

**Christ Our Passover**

“Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover” (v. 1). First, I want to remind you that the Old Testament Passover was merely a temporary type and picture of our Lord Jesus Christ. God the Holy Spirit declares in 1 Corinthians 5:7, “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us.” The Passover was the first legal ordinance established by God in the Old Testament (Exodus 12). It was established as a memorial of Israel’s redemption out of Egypt by the blood of the paschal lamb and the power of God. That first Passover and all the Passover sacrifices that followed it (as well as all the other requirements, ceremonies, services, and sacrifices of the law)
were given for only one purpose: to hold forth in type the Lord Jesus Christ. To him the whole law pointed; and by him the whole law was fulfilled. All those things were, as we are plainly told, shadows of good things to come (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1).

Believers in the Old Testament era observed the Passover looking upon the paschal lamb as a type of the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8), just as we now observe the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”. The lamb appointed in the Jewish Passover was to be a male of the first year without blemish and without spot. Such was Christ. The lamb was set apart four days before the Passover. So Christ was set apart eternally in the purpose, council, and foreknowledge of God and by entering into Jerusalem four days before his death upon the cursed tree. The Jewish paschal lamb was roasted whole with fire, and not a bone of it broken. So our Lord Jesus, in the accomplishment of our eternal redemption, sustained all the fire of Divine wrath against sin in his sacrifice; and we are expressly told that not one of his bones were broken, that the scripture might be fulfilled (John 19:36).

The scriptures tell us that our Saviour observed the feast of Passover four times during the course of his earthly ministry. The first public Passover Christ observed is related to us in John 2:13-25. The second Passover, which our Lord graced with his presence, is recorded in John 5, when he healed the lame man at the pool of Bethesda. The third public Passover where we find the Lord Jesus present is recorded in John 6, at which time our Lord gave instructions about himself as the Bread of Life. The fourth and last Passover the Lord Jesus kept is recorded here in Luke 22 and by Matthew, Mark, and John.

Robert Hawker made the following tremendous observation. “If the Lord Jesus never once during his ministry omitted his attendance on the Passover, how hath he thereby endeared to his
redeemed his holy Supper, instituted and appointed as it was by himself to take place in his church in the room of the Jewish Passover! Surely by this Jesus might be supposed to intimate his holy pleasure, that his people should be always present at the celebration of it. Methinks by this constant attendance of the Lord, he meant to say that not one of his little ones should be absent at his Supper. And his servant, the Apostle, seems to have had the same views of his Master’s gracious design in this particular when he saith, ‘For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come’ (1 Corinthians 11:26).”

**Overruling Providence**

“And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people” (v. 2). Second, I cannot avoid again calling your attention to the display here given of the overruling providence of our God, as we read here of the chief priests and scribes plotting to murder our Saviour. Though they had no awareness of it, they were but instruments in the Lord’s hands for the accomplishment of his holy will and eternal decrees, by their wicked hands, doing all that they did by the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23; 4:27, 28; 13:27, 28).

How sweet! How comforting! How delightful this is! To behold the chief priests and scribes as God’s instruments, for the purpose of bringing Christ into the very situation where our sins must have brought us, but for his intervention! Though they utterly hated him, they brought him forward on the mission for which he came into the world, to “save His people from their sins”, being made both sin and a curse for us. There was no other means whereby we could have been redeemed; and God sovereignly overruled and used the most wicked deeds of the most wicked men to accomplish it!

I say this is sweet, comforting, and delightful to behold. Just
as it was here, so it is now. Our God overrules and uses the most malicious devices of the most wicked men to bring his purposed blessings to his chosen.

Blind Guides
Third, when we read that “the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him”, I am reminded that the most prominent, highly respected, and well-trained religious leaders are often blind guides. High office in the church does not indicate grace in the heart.

The first step in putting our Saviour to death was taken by the religious teachers of the Jewish nation. The very men who ought to have welcomed the Messiah were the men who conspired to murder him. The very pastors who ought to have rejoiced at the appearing of the Lamb of God plotted his slaughter. They sat in Moses’ seat. They claimed to be “guides of the blind” and “lights of them that were in darkness” (Romans 2:19). They belonged to the tribe of Levi. They were, most of them, direct descendants of Aaron. Yet, they were the very men who crucified the Lord of glory!

Beware of attaching importance, significance, and spiritual knowledge to preachers and religious leaders. Ordination papers do not make men faithful. The greatest of heresies have been started by preachers.

By all means, honour faithful men. Hear them and obey them. Faithful pastors are the angels of God to his church. They speak to you the Word of God; and they are to be followed (Hebrews 13:7, 17). But we must never allow blind men to lead us into the ditch. We must never allow modern chief priests and scribes to make us crucify Christ afresh. We must test all teachers by the unerring rule of the Word of God. “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).
Judas’ Apostasy
“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” (vv. 3-6).

Fourth, Judas’ apostasy sets before us a glaring example of the fact that men and women who appear to have a good profession of faith often prove reprobates in the end, teaching us the necessity of perseverance. The treachery here described was the treachery of one of the twelve Apostles of Christ. “Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve.” Those words are peculiarly dreadful. Judas Iscariot ought to be a standing beacon to us all. Judas was one of our Lord’s chosen apostles. He followed our Lord during the whole course of his ministry. He forsook all for Christ’s sake. He heard Christ preach and saw Christ’s miracles. He preached the same doctrine Christ preached. He spoke like all the other Apostles. There was nothing about Judas to distinguish him from Peter, James, and John. He was never suspected of being unsound, let alone the betrayer. Yet, Judas was a reprobate man, “the son of perdition” (John 17:12).

At best we have but a faint conception of the horrid deceitfulness of our hearts. The lengths to which men may go in religion without grace in their hearts is far greater than we think (Psalm 139:23, 24; Matthew 10:22; 1 Corinthians 9:26, 27; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:38, 39; 1 John 2:19, 20).

Beware of Covetousness
Fifth, the fact that Judas’ betrayal was the result of his love of money reinforces our Lord’s warning in Luke 12:15. “Take heed and beware of covetousness.” What enormous power the love of money has over men! When Judas went to the chief
priests and offered to betray his Master, “they were glad, and
covenanted to give him money” (v. 5). That tells us the hidden
secret of Judas’ heart and the motive behind his behaviour. He
loved money. He loved the world. He was fond of riches. He had
heard our Lord’s solemn warning. “Take heed and beware of
covetousness.” But he gave it no heed. Covetousness was the
rock upon which he made shipwreck of his soul. Covetousness
dragged him headlong into hell!

Beware of the love of this world, particularly as it involves
the love of money, which the Holy Spirit tells us is “the root of
all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira, and
Judas were brought to ruin because of their love of money. And
the money they sought, for which they sold their souls, was
terribly insignificant! For a mere thirty pieces of silver Judas
Iscariot betrayed the Son of God! Thirty pieces of silver was the
legal price of a slave. No doubt, these religious hypocrites
soothed their consciences by telling themselves that by
purchasing Jesus like any other slave, it was perfectly legal for
them to hand him over to the Roman authorities. Thirty pieces of
silver. What did Judas buy with his hellish craftiness? He did not
gain acceptance with the powerful, elite priests and scribes, as
he probably hoped he would; but was now looked upon as
nothing but a contemptible slave trader, a hireling, and a
betrayer. Thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave to a greedy
man, proved at last to be the price he put upon his own immortal
soul. Thirty pieces of silver was taken out of the temple treasury,
silver that was marked for the purchase of sacrifices. The Lamb
of God was purchased with money from the temple treasury for
the price of a slave!

Beware of the love of money! It is a subtle thing, and far
nearer than we might imagine. A poor man is just as susceptible
to it as a rich man. Some have much who do not love it; and
many have very little who yet love it. Let us be “content with
such things as we have” (Hebrews 13:5), be it little or much. We
never know what we might do if we became suddenly rich. I find it striking that in the Book of Wisdom (Proverbs) we find only one prayer (Proverbs 30:8, 9).

“Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”

**Made Ready**

“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. 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 guestchamber, 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” (vv. 7-13).

Sixth, we learn that when the time came for the Passover to be kept, everything was made ready. Even so, when chosen sinners are called by the Spirit of God to eat the true Passover, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, they find everything made ready for them.

All things were made ready by divine arrangement. What a marvellous display we have in these verses of our Saviour’s absolute dominion over all things and all men! The disciples found a man by divine direction, who by divine command provided everything that was needed.

All things were made ready for the keeping of the feast. A lamb was provided. The lamb was slain and burnt upon the altar for the Lord God and for these disciples. Its blood was sprinkled
at the foot of the altar. The lamb was brought into the house, where it was to be eaten. The lamb was roasted and eaten with bitter herbs.

In all these things we see a close parallel with Christ our Passover who was sacrificed for us, and of our faith in him. Four times we are reminded in these thirteen verses that the evening before our Saviour’s crucifixion was the appointed “day when the Passover must be killed”. “Then came the day”! How thankful I am that that day came! Aren’t you! “In due time Christ died for the ungodly”!

By divine arrangement, the Lamb of God died at the very time when the passover lamb was being slain. The death of Christ was the fulfilment of the Passover. He was the true sacrifice to which every passover-lamb had been pointing for 1500 years. What the death of the lamb had been to Israel in Egypt, his death is to us in reality. The safety which the blood of the passover-lamb had provided for Israel, his blood provides in infinite abundance for believing sinners. Blessed be God forever “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us”! (1 Corinthians 5:7).
Chapter 40

“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: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. 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. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:14-20).

“In Remembrance Of Me”

In these verses the Holy Spirit describes how our blessed Saviour instituted, as a perpetual ordinance in his Church, the observance of the Lord’s Supper. This is one of those passages of holy scripture that ought to immediately arouse deep reverence in our hearts.

I find it utterly astonishing that this blessed ordinance of Divine worship, so beautifully simple and majestic, so delightfully unifying and blessed, has been made a matter of fear and a point of controversy and division throughout the history of the Church. How dishonouring that is to our Saviour, by whom the ordinance was established and for whose honour it is to be
kept!

No Fencing
We are specifically told that Judas was with the disciples when the Lord Jesus established this ordinance in his Church. “And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him” (v. 14). After making his bargain with the chief priests, scribes, and elders to betray the Son of God, Judas brazenly came and took his place with the rest of the apostles, both to cover his sin and to watch the best opportunity of betraying the Master.

This fact makes it abundantly clear that our Lord did not fence the Table to keep unbelievers from eating the bread and wine with believers. He did not give any basis for the practice of closed communion.

Let me be clearly understood. The Lord’s Supper, like baptism and Church membership, is for believers only. We must never encourage unbelievers to join us in observing this blessed ordinance of the gospel. Yet, we must never attempt to set barriers around the Table to keep anyone away. The Holy Spirit makes it crystal clear that it is the responsibility of the person who eats the bread and drinks the wine to examine himself to be certain that he or she is a believer, one who discerns the Lord’s body, warning all those who eat and drink unworthily, that is to say without faith in Christ, that they eat and drink damnation to themselves (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

You, and you alone can determine whether you are in the faith. If you profess faith in Christ, it is my responsibility and the responsibility of all believers to look upon your profession as genuine and to receive you “without doubtful disputation”, without suspicion (Romans 14:1).

Our Lord knew that Judas was a devil and that he was, at that time, looking for an opportunity to betray him. Yet, when he passed out the bread and wine, he gave it to Judas, as well as to
James and John, because Judas professed to be one of his.

Christ’s Desire
In verse 15 our Saviour expressed his heart’s ambition and desire to redeem us. “And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.” He desired to eat this, the last passover, with his disciples because, in doing so, he had come to the end of his mission in this world. He was about to suffer all the fury of God’s holy wrath and offended justice as our Substitute and enter into his glory. Before doing so, he established this communion ordinance as a perpetual reminder to us that our union and communion with him is based upon and arises from his sin-atoning death upon the cursed tree.

He desired to eat it with them, with his disciples, because his desire is toward us his people (2 Peter 3:9). It was so from everlasting, when he desired us as his spouse and bride. It was so in time, when he became incarnate; suffered, died, and gave himself for us. His desire is towards his people before they are called, while unregenerate, unbelieving rebels. And his desire is with us and toward us still, notwithstanding all our sin and unbelief (Song of Solomon 5:1, 2).

In ourselves we are black with sin; but in him we are comely and beautiful, robed with his righteousness, washed, pure, and made white in his precious blood; so comely and beautiful in his eyes that he declares he is ravished by us! Imagine that! The Son of God declares that we ravish his heart (Song of Solomon 4:9). Therefore, he desires our company and communion always!

The Lord Jesus delighted in us from eternity, viewing us as perfect in himself before the world was made. We were the joy set before him, the joy that sustained him and carried him through his sufferings and death. You and I, child of God, are the objects of his unceasing desires and prayers!

Our blessed Saviour desired with desire to eat this, the last passover, because that meant that his sufferings and death were
at hand, that the eternal redemption of our souls was about to be accomplished (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9, 10). Justice would soon be satisfied. The law would soon be fulfilled. Our sins would soon be atoned for and put away. The Father would soon be glorified by his obedience unto death.

Until It Be Fulfilled
The law, once it was fulfilled by him, was about to end. The passover and all the ceremonies and rituals of the law were about to be abolished forever. Therefore, he said, “I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (v. 16). Now that it has all been fulfilled by him, our blessed Saviour girds himself with grace and serves us with all that was signified and typified in the law. And, in the glory that soon shall be ours we will eat and drink together with him in his Father’s kingdom, and spend an endless eternity in never fading joys and pleasures, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Exodus 15:1-18).

The Cup
“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” (vv. 17, 18).

In the observance of the Jewish passover four cups were used. Commonly, as each cup was passed around the table, one by one, the head of the house would lead the family in prayer and thanksgiving. Then the family would drink from the cups, divided among them. Having done this, the Lord Jesus said, “For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of this vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.”

What was our Lord referring to here? Perhaps he was simply saying, “I am about to leave this world, and will never again eat and drink with you physically.” Perhaps he was talking about the
new wine of grace that was to be poured out by him in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. I think he was most likely referring to the everlasting celebration of redemption with us in eternal glory, when we shall eat and drink at his table forever, as he tells us in verse 30.

The Ordinance Established

In verses 14-18 we are given a record of the Lord Jesus observing the last passover feast with his family, with his disciples. In verses 19 and 20 the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper is established.

“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you” (vv. 19, 20).

We know that these words refer to the establishing of the Lord’s Supper, because the Holy Spirit tells us that in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. Read the last line of verse 19 again. “This do in remembrance of me.” How many times have we read this command, without pausing to consider its implications? The first implication of this command is that this ordinance, as I stated in the beginning, is for believers only. In order to remember Christ you must first know him. I hope that you do know the Saviour. If you do, the Lord’s Table is spread for you. But if you do not know him, you must not eat the bread and drink the wine. Second, this command reveals the love of Christ for us. Our Saviour would not care for us to remember him, if he did not love us. Love wants to be remembered. And our Lord Jesus, as he was leaving this world, whispered into the ear of his bride, “Remember me.” And, third, this command implies a horrible tendency in us to forget our Redeemer. Because our Lord remembers that we are dust, he graciously established this
ordinance that we might, in observing it, remember him.

In our assembly we gather around the Lord’s Table every Sunday night to observe the Lord’s Supper, according to his commandment. The Table is our Lord’s memorial. As we eat the bread and drink the wine, we should earnestly pray that God the Holy Spirit will graciously enable us to remember Christ, our Beloved.

In these two verses of scripture we have complete directions for observing the Lord’s Supper. Here we see what it is and how it is to be done. The directions are plain, clear, and definite. We must “this do”. It would not be right to do something else. It would not be right to do this for some other purpose. And it would not be right to do this in some other way.

Simplicity
This blessed ordinance is to be observed with simplicity. There is nothing here that is ornate, mysterious, or even visibly impressive. The ordinances of the gospel are simple, like Christ himself, transparent, and unpretentious. There is nothing here but bread and wine.

This is an ordinance to be frequently observed. Paul said, “As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come.” Because we have a constant need to be reminded of our Lord and his work of redemption, he has given us an ordinance to frequently aid our memory.

This is an ordinance to be observed by all the Lord’s people. Around this Table, as in the kingdom of God, we are all equal. Our needs are the same. Our grounds of acceptance are the same. Our acceptance with our God is the same. We are “accepted in the Beloved”, by the merits of his righteousness and shed blood, in union with him, as one with him.

This ordinance is a token of God’s everlasting covenant of grace. Every time we eat the bread and drink the wine, we should be reminded of that covenant God made with his Son on
our behalf before the worlds were made. It is a covenant of grace (Romans 9:16-18). It is ordered in all things and sure (2 Samuel 23:5). It is a covenant ratified by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 13:20).

This blessed ordinance is a picture sermon of our Redeemer’s death. We remember Christ best when we remember his death. The unleavened bread is the symbol of his body, his holy humanity, his accomplished righteousness as our God-man Representative. The wine represents his precious blood, his accomplished redemption as our Substitute and covenant Surety.

And our observance of this ordinance is a picture of our salvation by faith in Christ. To trust Christ is to receive him, to eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6:51-56). By faith in him, we take to ourselves all that Christ is and all that he accomplished as our God-man Mediator, receiving the atonement he performed for us (Romans 5:11).

“**This Do**”

We are commanded to keep this ordinance. Our Saviour said, “This do.” Therefore, we may reasonably and safely infer that it is always proper for us to do it. It is always proper for God’s people to observe the Lord’s Supper, to keep the ordinance, and never proper not to do it. We may eat the Lord’s Supper, though we often sadly forget him. In fact, our forgetfulness is a reason to come to this ordinance.

We may come to the Table, though others forget our Saviour. We come not to judge others, but to remember Christ. And if some of our brethren are out of sorts, that does not bar us from the privilege of this ordinance. We may come to this ordinance no matter how weak, cold, and sinful we are. Our worthiness is Christ. We keep the ordinance to remember his goodness and grace.

It will be sweet, refreshing and comforting to you to eat the Lord’s Supper. What can be sweeter than the remembrance of
Christ? What can be more refreshing to your soul? What can be so comforting to your heart?

“*In Remembrance*”
The object of this ordinance is that we may remember our dear Saviour. “This do in remembrance of Me.” We are to observe this ordinance in remembrance of Christ himself, not his doctrines, but himself, not his precepts, but himself. As we eat the bread and drink the wine, let us remember the Lord Jesus. Remember him as the only Object of your faith and the mighty Representative of your soul: past, present, and future. Remember the Lord Jesus as the Joy of your heart, the Rewarder of your hope, and the Lord of your life.

Remember Christ. Remember who he is. Remember what he has done. Remember why he did it. Remember what he is to you (1 Corinthians 1:30). Remember him with sincere gratitude. Remember him with deep love. Remember him with confident faith.

Remember Thee, and all Thy pains,  
And all Thy love to me.  
Yes, while a pulse or breath remains,  
I will remember Thee.

And when these failing lips grow dumb,  
And thought and memory flee;  
When Thou shalt in Thy kingdom come,  
Jesus, remember me!  

James Montgomery

Let me remind you of four things clearly set before us in this passage.

The purpose of the Lord’s Supper is to perpetually remind us of Christ’s death for us, to remind us of the cost of our
redemption. The bread represents his body, his holy humanity sacrificed for us. The wine represents his precious, sin-atoning blood.

This is not an optional ordinance, any more than believer’s baptism is an optional ordinance. It is the privilege and responsibility of every believer to observe the Lord’s Supper, in remembrance of Christ.

There will always be betrayers in our midst. The words of verses 21 and 22 are recorded here so plainly that it is obvious that the Holy Spirit intended for us to be reminded that tares always grow side by side with wheat. Our Saviour said, “Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed”! We are never justified in separating ourselves from God’s Church and people because some among us are devils. And we are never justified in refusing to observe the Lord’s Supper because we imagine that some at the Table might be unbelievers.

It is your own responsibility, and no one else’s, to examine yourself (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). You alone must determine whether you are or are not a believer. You alone know if you are trusting Christ alone as your Saviour, whether you discern the Lord’s body and know the purpose of his incarnation, obedience, and death as the sinner’s Substitute.
“But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed! 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. 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. 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. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:21-30).

“Who Is The Greatest?”

We often try to make comparisons between material, earthly things and spiritual, heavenly things. But there is one great problem with all such comparisons: they simply cannot be made! Any rule or principle that is taken from the natural realm and applied to the spiritual realm must be reversed. In the natural realm success is measured by gain. In the spiritual world
success is measured by loss (Matthew 16:25). In the natural world wealth is gained and measured by what a man is able to gain and save. In the spiritual world wealth is gained and measured by what he gives (Proverbs 19:17; 11:24; 22:9; Luke 6:38). In natural things a “self-made” man is admired. In spiritual things a self-made man is condemned (Romans 4:4, 5). In natural things ambition and aggressiveness are looked upon as commendable things. In the kingdom of God they are deplorable things. Natural men are admired who strive for advancement and promotion. But the Spirit of God teaches us to strive for abasement and servitude.

This was a hard lesson for the disciples to learn, because, like us, they each wanted to be the greatest. In the New Testament it appears that the one thing which disrupted the fellowship, communion, and harmony of our Lord’s disciples, more than anything else, was personal ambition, the desire for personal exaltation, recognition, and greatness (Matthew 18:1; 20:20, 21; Mark 9:33-35; Luke 9:46-48).

Even as they sat around the Table with the Lord Jesus on the eve of his crucifixion, eating the last supper, while he talked to them about his death, as he gave them the blessed ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, “there was a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest”? What a pitiful picture we have before us: brethren, sitting together with Christ at the table of communion striving about which of them would betray the Master (vv. 22, 23) and which of them would be counted the greatest (v. 24).

Where humility should have abounded, pride and ambition intruded! When love and unity should have prevailed, ambition divided! Our Lord’s words to us in Luke 22:21-30 are intended by him to cure us of the evil of ambition, of self-seeking, self-serving, self-promoting pride. As we read this sad story, let us ask God the Holy Spirit to teach us its lessons. I remind you that the Lord Jesus had just eaten the last passover with his disciples
and instituted the blessed ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. Then, the Lord Jesus gave them an example of humility and love that should forever cure his followers of this evil (John 13:12-17). After that, the disciples began to fuss about who should be accounted the greatest among them.

Very few realize it; but he that is greatest in the kingdom of God is the servant of all. We all have lofty desires. We talk piously about our desires to be like Christ, to live the Christian life, to honour God in our lives. Is that truly the desire of our hearts? If it is, let us pray that God the Holy Spirit will teach us to serve one another. If the Son of God made himself the least, we must not strive to be the greatest. If our Master became our Servant, let us serve one another (Philippians 2:1-7).

“He that Serveth”
First, our Lord assumed the place of a servant among his disciples. He says, “I am among you as he that serveth.” In this world our Lord was not one of the cultured few upon whom others wait. He was not one of the rich, the mighty, or the noble whom others serve. He was the Servant of servants (Mark 10:42-45). When he came down from heaven, he took upon himself the form of a servant.

In the circle of his disciples Christ was always the one who served. He healed the sick. He fed the multitudes. Only once did he ask anyone to give him anything; and then it was that he might show his humility. Being a Jew, he condescended to ask a Samaritan woman for a drink of water. Even then, his object was that he might serve her.

Where he was most evidently the Master, among his own disciples, he was most evidently the Servant. Like a shepherd, he was Servant to his sheep. Like a nurse, he was Servant to the children of God. Like a chambermaid, he washed his disciples’ feet.

In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper the Lord himself was
among his disciples as “he that serveth”. He provided the table. He desired the fellowship of his brethren at the Passover. He broke the bread. He offered the prayer. He poured the wine.

Throughout the whole course of his life on earth, the Lord Jesus took the position of a servant, a slave. When he entered into the covenant of grace with the Father as our Surety, the Son of God became a voluntary Servant (Psalm 40:6; Isaiah 50:5-7; Exodus 21:6). When he came into the world to save us, he announced himself as the Servant of Jehovah (Psalm 40:7; Hebrews 10:5-10). The physical body prepared for our Saviour and all his earthly surroundings were fitted for service (Hebrews 10:5; Philippians 2:7; 2 Corinthians 8:9).

Throughout his life, our Lord Jesus cared for and served others (Matthew 20:28). He laid aside his own will and pleasure and came to do the will and pleasure of his Father, serving our interest (John 4:34; 6:38). He patiently bore all manner of evil from men as one who is servant to another (1 Peter 2:23). The Son of God assumed the lowest place among men, that he might bring us to the highest place of heavenly glory as the sons of God (Psalm 22:6; Isaiah 53:3; 2 Corinthians 8:9).

Adore Him
What we have seen thus far should fill our hearts with wonder and adoration. What astonishing love! What amazing grace! He who is the Son of God became Servant to those who are his servants! Does that fact not astonish you? He who is Lord of all became the Servant of all his people (Colossians 1:15-19). The Creator served the creature! The Ruler served his subjects! The Firstborn served the adopted children! He who is “all fulness” served us, who are all emptiness! He who has all preeminence served us, who are less than nothing!

He who is infinitely Superior in wisdom, power, and holiness became Servant to the very lowest (Matthew 8:26, 27; John 14:9). He gave sight to blind beggars. He defended an
adulterous woman. He calmed the troubled waters for his unbelieving disciples. He ministered to the small child. He stretched out his hand to drowning Peter. He removed the doubts of doubting Thomas. He came to Peter, when Peter had forsaken him.

But do not imagine that our Lord’s service was limited to those disciples, or even to his time on earth. He performed all his earthly service for us. He serves us now. And he will serve us forever. He who is our great Benefactor became Servant to us who are the beneficiaries of his grace (John 15:16). The righteousness he accomplished was for us (Romans 5:19). The death he died, the atonement he made was for us (Galatians 4:4, 5). His heavenly intercession is for us (Hebrews 7:24, 25). His providential rule is for us (John 17:2). The angelic hosts, his holy servants, are sent by him to serve us (Hebrews 1:14). Throughout the ages of eternity, all the glory, joy, and bliss of heaven will be given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. Even then, he will serve us (Luke 12:37). Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory, condescends to serve us, who are altogether unworthy of his notice, much less his service.

**The Cause**

How can this great condescension on the part of Christ be explained? What is the cause of it? What is the reason for it? Why has he done it? Here are three answers. (1.) The Lord Jesus Christ is so infinitely great that he loses nothing by serving us (Hebrews 1:2-4). (2.) The Son of God is so full of love to us that his love for us compels him to serve us (John 15:9; 1 John 3:16; John 13:1). And (3.) our Mediator, the God-man, is so entirely consecrated to the glory of God that he willingly endured even the painful, shameful death of the cross for us, that he might glorify God (Matthew 26:38, 39; John 12:28).
Imitate Him

May God the Holy Spirit graciously teach us to imitate our Saviour by serving one another. Let this be the rule of our lives (John 13:5, 13-15). If we would be great in the kingdom of God, we must become servants. There is no greater, more noble ambition than this (Ephesians 4:32 5:1). If we would follow Christ, let us cheerfully choose to fulfil the most lowly services in the kingdom of God. Blessed are those saved sinners who seek from God the Holy Spirit, the spirit of true love and humility toward their brethren (Ephesians 4:1-3; Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5). It is in this way that we are to continually lay down our lives for one another (1 John 3:16, 17). This is that which inspired the apostle Paul to spend and be spent for God’s elect (2 Corinthians 12:15). May God give us grace to make self-sacrifice the rule by which we live, ever seeking the good of others (Philippians 2:4, 5).

Rather than whining, “Nobody comes to see me”, why don’t you go see somebody? Rather than complaining because no one calls me, I ought to call someone. Rather than selfishly thinking, “Nobody seems to care about me”, we ought to take care of others. Rather than being bitter because we are forgotten, we ought to make it our business to remember others. Over the span of more than sixty years in this world, I have observed a remarkable thing: those who spend their lives caring for and serving others never whine and complain about being neglected and overlooked or forgotten, while those who constantly complain about being neglected and overlooked and forgotten seldom do anything for anyone but themselves.

If we would serve Christ and his people, we should never avenge ourselves, bring grief to others, or disrupt the blessed peace of God’s saints; but rather bear any injustices done to us, just as our Master did (1 Peter 2:19-21). Always seek the place in God’s Kingdom in which you are likely to receive the least and can give the most. Choose to serve rather than to be served!
Our Lord did. The place of highest honour in the Church of God is the place of greatest service. The towel with which Christ wiped his disciples’ feet is indescribably more attractive than the royal robes of the greatest king on earth.

There are just two kinds of people in this world: those who use and those who are used. God, make me one who is used. Those who take and those who give. I want to be a giver. Those who are served and those who serve. I pray that God will make me a servant. “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Christ, the Servant of all (Matthew 11:11). Let us strive to be like him!
Chapter 42

“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me” (Luke 22:31-34).

Peter’s Fall And Restoration

“Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. 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 affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. 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” (Luke 22:54-62).
The verses before us record the painful, but very instructive, story of Peter’s terrible denial of the Lord Jesus. This sad story is recorded in detail in all four gospel narratives. Yet, neither Matthew, Mark, Luke, nor John make any excuse for or defence of their friend, Peter. They all wrote their histories, not as mere men writing about men, but as instruments of Divine inspiration. This story of Peter’s fall was written by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit for our learning and admonition. May the Spirit of God who gave us this story four times now inscribe its lessons upon our hearts by his almighty grace, for Christ’s sake.

Try to picture the scene and the events which transpired on that cold, bitter night, if you can. It was a solemn, solemn night. Our Lord Jesus himself called it “the judgment (crisis) of this world”. The disciples had just observed the last passover meal of the legal dispensation and the first communion service of the gospel age. The Lord Jesus told them plainly of his certain, imminent betrayal and death. Peter, James, and John had spent the night with the Son of God in Gethsemane. On that sacred evening, our Saviour preached that marvellous sermon which is recorded in John 14, 15, and 16. It was on this night, earlier in the evening, that our Master, our great High Priest, offered that great prayer for us which is recorded in John 17. The soldiers came, like a mob of lynch men, into the garden to arrest the Lord of glory, led by his own familiar friend, Judas Iscariot. Judas betrayed him with a kiss. And Peter denied the Lord Jesus, denied him again, and denied him a third time, cursing like a drunken sailor.

Why do you suppose this record is given four times in the New Testament? I do not pretend to know the full answer to that question; but I can think of at least four reasons why this sad tale is told in such detail by all four gospel writers. Surely the Holy Spirit means for us to give it special attention.

1. Peter’s denial of the Lord Jesus must have greatly increased the pain and suffering of our tender-hearted Saviour.
2. The Holy Spirit would set before us, in a most emphatic way, the greatness of our Saviour’s saving power, the majesty of his unconditional grace, and the immutability of his faithfulness.

3. The divine Comforter knew that we would all be subject to these same temptations.

4. The record of Peter’s fall is intended to be a startling, instructive lesson for us concerning the frailty of the best of men.

The Word of God does not tell us very much even about the very best of men who lived in Bible times. The histories of God’s saints in scripture are very scanty. Yet, the Word of God very particularly records the faults and falls of the most eminent saints. It seems that the Holy Spirit’s purpose is to remind us incessantly that “all flesh is grass”! The best of men are only men at best. And he incessantly reminds us that “Salvation is of the Lord”! Peter was not the infallible bishop of Rome, as the papists pretend. He was just a frail, fallible, fickle, sinful man. The only thing the pope has in common with Peter is his denial of Christ.

Peter’s fall seems to say to every one of us “You, too, are weak. You, too, will fall, if left to yourself. Do not ever trust yourself. Trust Christ entirely. Lean on him constantly. Do not rely upon your great experiences or the imaginary strength and firmness of your faith. Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat. Christ alone can hold you up. Christ alone can keep you.” We must ever watch and pray! We must each diligently watch over our own souls and prayerfully seek the Lord’s preserving grace, if we would live for the honour of his name.

I want to live for the honour of Christ. I want to honour and magnify him in my living as well as in my preaching. I know that you who love him want the same thing. My heart shudders, my soul trembles at the thought of bringing reproach upon the name of him who loved me and gave himself for me. Yet, I
know this, unless Christ himself preserves me from the evil that is in me and preserves you from the evil that is in you, we will, most certainly, profane his name.

The Circumstances Of Peter’s Fall
How did such a great man come to commit such a grievous evil? Luke is not describing a lost man, but a saint, a child of God, redeemed by blood, justified in Christ, saved by grace, and sanctified by the Spirit. Peter was in the prime of his life a faithful giant among faithful giants. Few before him and few after him could stand shoulder to shoulder with Peter. He was a man strong in faith, firm in conviction, bold in preaching and unrelenting in his zeal for Christ.

This man was eminent even among the apostles, a leader among leaders, an example among examples. But this man, great as he was, was just a man. Like you and me, he was a man whose heart, by nature, was full of sin, whose flesh was weak.

On that dark, dark night in the high priest’s palace, this man’s evil heart broke out in a horrible display of ungodliness, in an act as evil and vile as any in human history. The godly apostle Peter blasphemously denied the Son of God with foul oaths!

How can we account for this thing? As we look at the circumstances of Peter’s fall, I remind you, there were no extenuating circumstances to excuse or even mitigate his guilt. Indeed, everything recorded in the inspired gospel records aggravates his offence.

Peter’s fall was very strange because he was one of the Lord Jesus’ most highly favoured and most highly honoured disciples. The Lord had done so much for Peter! He was one of the very first to whom the Son of God made himself known while he was in the world, one of the first to be saved by the power of his word (John 1:40-42). Peter was in the inner circle of the Master’s most intimate friends. Peter seems to have been the
chief spokesman for the early church⁹.

Peter’s fall is especially sad because he was plainly and faithfully warned of his great danger (Luke 22:31-34). Our Lord Jesus told Peter in the plainest language possible exactly what was going to happen to him. He even gave him the details. Peter was told of the danger to which he was about to be exposed. Satan desired to have him. His faith would be fiercely attacked. He must watch and pray, that he enter not into temptation. But Peter walked headlong into danger. He rejected the light God had given him. He ignored the revelation of God’s Word!

Peter’s guilt is aggravated, too, by the fact that it came so soon after he had confidently declared his loyalty to Christ (Matthew 26:31-35; Luke 22:33). Just a few hours after his proud, confident boast of his love for Christ, Peter cursed and denied him three times. How fickle we are!

Still, Peter’s fall did not come at once, but by degrees. He followed the Lord afar off (v. 51). He sat in the seat of scorners (v. 55), seeking the comfort and warmth their fire provided. And he denied the Lord Jesus by degrees. At first, he pretended not to understand the maiden’s words. Then, he denied that he knew the man (compare Matthew 16:18 and John 6:69) ¹⁰. At last, he took the profane language of base, ungodly men to prove that he was no follower of the holy Lamb of God¹¹.

⁹ The greater our privileges and the higher our honours, the greater our responsibilities are and the more horrible our offences.

¹⁰ It takes very little to make a great saint fall into great sin, if God leaves him to himself. Peter’s trial was nothing but the word of a weak young woman, who said, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth."

¹¹ There are many, many ways by which men and women deny the Lord Jesus Christ; but usually the falls of God’s saints are not sudden. Normally, great falls are preceded by much smaller inconsistencies.
Here is another very great aggravation of Peter’s sin: All this was done very close to the place where his Lord and Master was at that time suffering for him, bearing his reproach! The Lord Jesus Christ was standing right in front of Peter, hearing every word!

What was the reason for Peter’s fall? How can we account for all of this? How did this man, so great, so unique in so many ways come to commit such an horrible offence? Peter was far too proud of himself, far too confident of his own strength. He was overcome by the fear of man, in this case, by the fear of a woman who had no obvious power against him. He neglected watchfulness over his own heart and soul (Proverbs 4:23). I suspect that, like mother Eve, Peter had begun to doubt the Saviour’s word.

**The Means Of Peter’s Recovery**

Peter fell; but he did not perish. His faith weakened; but it did not die. He sinned; but he was not cast off or forsaken. He denied the Lord; but the Lord did not deny him. Peter belonged to Christ; and Christ can never lose one of his own. The good Shepherd can never lose one of his sheep. Peter fell; but Christ graciously raised him up.

The righteous fall seven times a day; but the Lord raises them up (Proverbs 24:16). How did the Lord Jesus restore his fallen servant? I see four things the Lord used to restore his fallen child.

A work of providence: “the cock crew”! God has many ways of reaching a man’s conscience. He can make asses speak as easily as prophets; and he can make a rooster crow on cue. Read Psalm 107, and marvel at the goodness of God that leads his chosen to repentance!

A work of grace: “the Lord turned and looked on Peter” (Luke 22:61). What a look that must have been! The Lord turned to Peter. Peter did not turn to the Lord. He looked upon Peter,
not in anger and disgust, but in mercy, love, and grace! That look was a look of tenderness, compassion, and faithfulness. With that look the Lord spoke silently, but effectually, to the heart of his fallen child. He seems to have said, “I have loved thee with an everlasting love … ye have not chosen me; but I have chosen you … I give unto you eternal life; and you shall never perish … I will never leave thee nor forsake thee … I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions … fear not, for I have redeemed thee … I am thy strength … I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed … greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends … return unto me, return unto me; and I will pardon.”

A work of the Word “Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice” (v. 61). The Word of God graciously and effectually brought Peter to repentance.

A work of our Advocate “I have prayed for thee” (Luke 22:32). As a great High Priest and Intercessor, the Lord Jesus Christ prayed for Peter’s preservation in faith and restoration by grace, even before he fell! That same great High Priest is our Advocate on high. He intercedes for us now, and has interceded for us from eternity (1 John 2:1, 2).

Then, at the time appointed, the Lord Jesus came to Peter, made himself known to Peter, and made Peter to know himself (John 21:15-17). These thoughts thrill my heart and flood my soul with joy! The Lord Jesus Christ is full of tenderness and mercy. His faithfulness is great. And his compassions never fail. He who is our God and Saviour is a faithful, unfailingly faithful God and Saviour!

If you are a believer, if truly you trust Christ alone as your Lord and Saviour, nothing shall ever separate you from him, not even your sins (Romans 4:8). Nothing can separate us from his love, his favour, his mercy, or his care. Nothing can ever sever
you from his saving power or his forgiveness. And nothing can ever tear you from his omnipotent hand of grace!

The Signs Of Peter’s Restoration
The Lord’s works for and upon Peter were effectual. They accomplished their intended design. And Peter was graciously restored by the very Saviour he so vehemently denied.

Peter’s trial and fall were not accidents. Satan ran God’s child through his rough sifter; but Peter lost nothing in the process but chaff. Peter came out of this thing a much better man than he was before, as the book of Acts demonstrates. Even this tragic affair was under the control of God’s sovereign providence and according to his purpose of grace.

Satan is God’s devil. That fiend of hell is the unwilling, unwitting vassal of the Almighty (Isaiah 14:12-27). Let us never forget that fact for a moment. The dragon of hell is as much included in all things working together for good to God’s elect as the angels of light (Romans 8:28).

Peter went out of the place (v. 62). Once fire was restored in his soul, he no longer needed the warmth of that fire which the Lord’s enemies had kindled. He immediately forsook those who had turned his heart from his Lord.

Peter wept bitterly (v. 62). Convulsive weeping overcame him he could not stand himself. His very heart was crushed within him. Oh, blessed is that man whose heart is broken before God. Christ Jesus heals the broken-hearted! “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise”! Do you know anything about repentance? Every heaven born soul does (Psalm 51:1-5).

Peter loved his Saviour “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee” (John 21:17). Our Lord’s purpose in squeezing this confession of love from Peter was altogether gracious. Many have imagined that our Saviour asked Peter this question three times to remind him of the fact that he had denied
him three times; but there is no indication that that was the case. In fact, I am confident it was not our Lord’s intention here to aggravate Peter’s sense of guilt and shame, but to prove to his dear disciple his grace toward him and his interest in that grace.

The well known and long proved love and grace of Christ Jesus to his elect inclines me to think that the Saviour asked Peter this question (“Lovest thou me?”) three times that he might give his fallen child the opportunity to openly repeat his own assurance of his love for Christ three times. Having declared, with assurance, “Lord, I truly do love you”, was the Lord’s way of making Peter understand that his threefold denial was no indication of his true character as a child of God. That was not really Peter, but sin dwelling in him (Romans 7:15-20).

The Lessons For Us
What are we to learn from this tragic event in Peter’s life? How can we benefit from it? What lessons are taught by this man’s fall and restoration?

Let us learn something about ourselves. We must never be presumptuous about ourselves. We are all very much like Peter in his weakness. We are all fickle, sinful wretches by nature. There is no evil in this world of which we are not capable (1 Corinthians 10:12; 4:7). We ought never be severe with our erring o fallen brothers and sisters in Christ.

Let us learn something about God’s grace and his salvation in Christ. It is unconditional. It is free. And it is indestructible! What blessed security our souls have in Christ! Nothing an ever severe us from our Saviour! “Once in Christ, in Christ forever”!

Let us learn something about the faithfulness of our great God and Saviour. “He abideth faithful”! “Faithful is he that calleth you”! “Great is thy faithfulness”!

“He will never, never leave us,
Nor will let us quite leave him.”
“Keep yourselves in the love of God.” Trust Christ alone. Live around the cross. Cling to Christ always. As often as you fall, return to Christ. Trust him still. Remember, the very next word our Lord spoke to Peter, after telling him that he would deny him three times that very night, was this …

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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. 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” (John 14:1-3).

When we most need him, let us turn to our Saviour and trust him still (Hebrews 4:16). He will receive you. He will forgive us. He will be gracious to us. He will forget the wrong we have done! “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Romans 4:8).
“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Luke 22:31, 32).

Sifted Wheat

If you were asked how to best secure the spiritual well-being of one of God’s saints, or how to best promote a believer’s spiritual growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, what would you recommend? I suspect you might say, “Put him in some place where he will be unmolested by the influence of the world, and always surrounded by other believers. Arrange for the brother or sister to have as few distractions, worldly cares, and tempting circumstances as possible. Encourage the child of God to spend several hours each day reading his Bible, praying, and meditating on spiritual things. And encourage him to exercise a life of strict discipline, abstaining from everything that might gratify his physical body.”

Pursue the same line of thought a little further. If I were to ask you the best way for a man to be prepared for the blessed work of preaching the gospel, to prepare a man to be a pastor or missionary, what would you suggest? You might say, “Send him away to a Bible college or seminary. Give him a good education. Teach him Hebrew and Greek. Supply him with a good library. Surround him with other aspiring preachers, with whom he can
meditate, pray, study the Bible, and discuss doctrine and religious issues of the day. And keep him, as much as possible, away from worldly people, who might corrupt his mind.”

That has been the practice of religious people throughout history. And it is appealing. It seems to make sense. Doesn’t it? But, if you care to look at history, you will discover that convents and monasteries have been, more often than not, dens of indescribable iniquity. And Bible colleges and seminaries, following the traditions of Rome, have made little improvement.

You can be sure of this fact. It applies to all things spiritual. God’s ways are not our ways. And his thoughts are not our thoughts. John Newton, the man who wrote that great hymn, “Amazing Grace”, understood this. He wrote ...

I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith, and love, and every grace;
Might more of his salvation know,
And seek more earnestly his face.

’Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
And He, I trust, has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

I hoped that in some favoured hour,
At once He’d answer my request;
And, by his love’s constraining power,
Subdue my sins, and give me rest.

Instead of this, he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart,
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.
Yea, more, with his own hand he seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe;
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

“Lord, why is this?” I trembling cried;
“Wilt Thou pursue Thy worm to death?”
“’Tis in this way,” the Lord replied,
“I answer prayer for grace and faith.”

“These inward trials I employ,
From self and pride to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy,
That thou mayst seek thine all in Me.”

In the passage before us God the Holy Spirit shows us, in the experience of his servant Peter, how our blessed Saviour graciously causes his saints to grow in grace, how he causes believers to grow in faith and in the knowledge of himself. And, in this passage we see the method our blessed, all-wise, and ever-gracious God and Saviour has chosen to prepare his servants to minister to and serve his people. Read it again.

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”

If we belong to Christ, Satan desires to have us, that he may sift us as wheat; but Christ himself prays for us, and thereby keeps us secure in his grace. May God the Holy Spirit make his Word in this place effectual to our hearts by the blessing of his grace, for Christ’s sake.

**Our Adversary’s Desire**

First, the Lord Jesus declares our adversary’s desire regarding
us. “The Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.” As the time drew near when the Lord Jesus would be forsaken by his disciples and forsaken by his Father, when he would suffer and die as our Substitute, bearing our sins in his own body upon the cursed tree, Satan seems to have seized what he thought was a perfect opportunity to draw away the Saviour’s disciples. He was not ignorant of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God, or that he came into this world in human flesh to redeem and save his people from their sins. Satan knew our Saviour had declared that he would build his Church and that the gates of hell could not prevail against it.

The fiend of hell also knew that the disciples were in a time of great confusion. They fully expected the Lord Jesus to establish an earthly kingdom. They had left all and followed him in the expectation of immediate glory. But the Master had now told them that he must suffer and die at Jerusalem by the hands of wicked men, that the scriptures might be fulfilled. Can you imagine how confused, disappointed, and frustrated they must have been. They said, “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” So the devil seems to have thought, “This is the perfect time for me to strike. If I can destroy these disciples, I will frustrate God’s purpose and promise. I will, at last, be victorious”! He seems to have reserved his great strength for this hour. He appears to have set his watchful eye upon the Lord’s followers, “as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

Job
The first two chapters of Job shed some light on this, showing us how Satan marks out his prey (Job 1:8-12; 2:4-6).

“And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and
an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD” (Job 1:8-12).

“And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life” (Job 2:4-6).

If you will look at the alternate translation of Job 1:8 given in the margin of your Bible (if you have a marginal reference), you will see that the words, “Hast thou considered my servant Job”, might be better translated, “Hast thou set thy heart upon my servant Job?” The Lord God knew that Satan had set his malicious heart upon Job, like a butcher sets his eye upon the calf selected for slaughter, or a wolf singles out one lamb in a flock of sheep.

Satan did not deny his malicious intent. Rather, he seems to have acknowledged it. His reply to God was, “Hast not thou made an hedge about him?” he did not deny that his heart was set upon Job, that he longed for his hands to be dipped in the blood of Job’s heart. But he complained that God had set a hedge around him, that the Lord had put a fence around his servant through which he could not break. He could look over the hedge and roar; but he could not touch Job until God took the hedge away. Twice the Lord took the hedge away, but still preserved the object of his mercy, love, and grace, saying, “Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.”
Though he gave everything else to the devil, he preserved his servant Job. When the hedge was taken away, Satan burst in upon Job, first stripping away his property and his family, then afflicting his body, but he was not permitted to touch his life.

That is a good picture of the scene before us in Luke 22. The wolf has circled the Lord’s flock, setting his heart on the sheep. Judas was permitted to be taken and destroyed, because he was the son of perdition. But, now, with the taste of Judas’ blood still warm in his mouth, Satan sets his heart upon the rest of the disciples. The fiend of hell wanted them all!

“Thee” And “Ye”
Did you ever wonder why the Bible sometimes uses the words “thee” and “ye”, and at other times uses the word “you”? Let me show you one of the beauties of our King James translation that is completely lost in all modern translations.

In the New Testament there is a distinct difference between the words “thee” and “ye” and the word “you”. Many object to using the word “You”, when referring to or speaking to our God, because they superstitiously imagine that “Thee” is more reverent than “You”. That certainly is not the case. It is no more reverent to say, “Hallowed be Thy name”, than “Hallowed be Your name.” Both are accurate translations of our Saviour’s words. We do not have to use “thee”, “thou”, “thy”, and “thine” in our prayers to be heard by God.

Yet, as I said, there is a distinct difference between the words “thee” and “ye” and the word “you”. Whenever you read the words “thee” and “ye” in your Bible, try to remember that those words are always singular pronouns, referring to one person. But, when you read the word “you”, that is a plural pronoun, referring to more than one person.

That sheds much light on our Saviour’s words to Peter. “Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you” (“you” all of you, my disciples), “that he may sift you (all of you) as wheat:
But I have prayed for thee” (“thee” singular) specifically for you, Peter “that thy” (“thy” singular) “faith fail not” The words “thy” and “thou”, like “thee” and “ye”, are singular pronouns. The Lord is saying, “Peter I have prayed for you specifically, that your faith fail not”. He is saying, “Peter, Satan has set his heart on you all to destroy you by sifting you as wheat, but I have prayed for you personally, that your faith fail not.”

All Wanted
I have said all that to say this. It is a mistake to think these words are only applicable to Peter. The Lord Jesus includes all his disciples, both in his prayer and in his stated purpose. He includes you and me here. Satan wants us all; and our Saviour wants us all. Who do you think will have what he wants?

Satan desires to have us all, that he may sift us as wheat. And, according to the measure of his own wise and gracious purpose, our Lord Jesus permits Satan to do just that. He will not allow him to have us; but he does use the devil to sift us as wheat. Yet, the Lord Jesus has prayed for us (John 17:15), prays for us (1 John 2:1, 2), and secures us by his grace (John 10:28).

The difference between Judas’ sin, which was for him sin unto death, and Peter’s sin (as well as yours and mine), was not their deeds, or the extent of their guilt, or the aggravating circumstances of their crimes, or even that one sinned against greater light or more persistently than the other. The only difference between Judas’s fall and Peter’s was this. The Lord Jesus prayed for Peter, that his faith fail not, but not for Judas.

The Sieve
All who profess faith in Christ, all who profess to be his disciples, all who call themselves by the name of the Lord Jesus must and shall be sifted as wheat. You and I must and shall be put into the sieve. By this means, God separates the wheat from the chaff and the precious from the vile.
You know what a sieve is. Every housewife uses one when she bakes. But the sieve referred to here is not commonly used today. It was a really big version of the one in your pantry. A sieve is a large meshed basket used to separate the grain from dirt, and chaff, and rubbish. It is shaken roughly back and forth. As it is shaken to and fro, the grain is separated from the chaff. All the dust and debris falls through the meshes of the sieve, while the good grain remains behind. This is a necessary instrument and a necessary work. Until the wheat is separated from the chaff, it is not fit for making bread.

Our Lord Jesus used that process to describe what is done when Satan is permitted to tempt and try God’s elect. But we must never imagine that Satan has his way. He never does. The sifting work is God’s. He simply uses Satan to do it. “For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth” (Amos 9:9).

We are sifted when we are put into circumstances that try our faith. Throughout our lives, we must be sifted. The sifting process does not change anything. It simply separates the wheat from the chaff. There are many sieves by which the precious grain is separated from the worthless chaff. Let me mention just four.

The sieve of prosperity is one means by which people are sifted. By prosperity, many who once appeared to have true faith in Christ have erred from the faith, proving themselves to be reprobate (1 Timothy 6:10).

Job tells us that though they have great wealth and live in ease, though they have all that they can desire in their hands, “their good is not in their hand … They are as stubble before the wind, and chaff that the storm carrieth away” (Job 21:16-18). David tells us that he was envious at the prosperity of the wicked, until he went into the house of God and understood what God had done to them by making them prosperous.
“Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction” (Psalm 73:18).

Nothing is more dangerous than the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. By this sieve, God sifts many and makes manifest whether their religion is true or false. The false, because of the love of money and the care of this world, when they have opportunity to gain what they really love, will, like Demas, forsake Christ, “having loved this present world” (2 Timothy 4:10). The true believer, when he is enriched like Abraham, or like Job in his later end, uses that which God has given him to worship, serve, and honour his God.

A second means of sifting is the sieve of adversity. This sieve tries both those who have not been tried in the sieve of prosperity and those who have survived it. Many who are poor would be ruined if they were suddenly, or even gradually made rich. And many who are rich would be ruined if they became impoverished. But there are many other adversities by which God separates the wheat from the chaff; sickness, domestic trouble, a neglectful and abusive spouse, an adulterous spouse, a disobedient child, bereavement.

A third means of sifting is the sieve of soul trouble. Tribulations within can be far more difficult to endure than those from without. What soul trouble Peter was about to experience! The sieve would cause him such anguish and pain as no one can comprehend, except those who experience it. He went out and wept bitterly because having denied his Saviour with oaths, he thought he had been nothing but a hypocrite. He thought everything was over for him. He said to the other disciples, “I go a fishing.” “I’m going back to being a fisherman.” How painful, how troublesome, how trying it is to discover the evil of our hearts! How painful, how troublesome, how trying it is to be suddenly assaulted with the unbelief, infidelity, obscenities, blasphemies, and rebellion of our depraved nature!

The children of darkness seem to always walk in the light.
But how often the children of light walk in darkness, with no light shining upon our path, with no sweet view of our Saviour and his grace. Rather, groaning and sighing with tears that seem to be unheard by our God! What a painful sifting we get by the sieve of soul trouble! Yet, I have no doubt that if Peter could sit down beside you and talk to you about these things, he would tell you that even these bitter things shall prove sweet works of God’s wondrous grace for you. In fact, he has done just that (1 Peter 1:1-9).

Temptation is a sieve. Often we are sifted in one hand by the sieve of soul trouble and in the other by the sieve of temptation. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Aaron were sifted by the fear of man. Rachel was sifted by envy and jealousy. Moses was sifted by impatience and a hot temper. David was sifted by lust and power, Solomon by women and idolatry, Hezekiah by pride.

Read through the Book of God. You will not find any believer whose name is recorded upon the pages of Inspiration who was not sifted in the sieve of temptation. But there are more severe temptations than these by which Satan is allowed to sift God’s saints. How often have you been tempted by inward doubts you would never dare talk about, questions by which many have finally been overcome? Questions and doubts regarding God’s existence, Christ’s deity, the Word of God, the love of God, the work of Christ, God’s goodness, God’s providence! How often have you felt within you an urge to scream out, “Enough! I cannot go on. I go a-fishing”, all the while weeping bitterly in your soul because of it! These are all sieves through which we must and shall be sifted, as long as we are in this world.

Our Saviour’s Intercession

Enough of that. Let me show you about something indescribably better than Satan’s desire and the pain of being sifted. Yet, were it not for the experience of being sifted, we could never
appreciate the great mercy and grace of our Saviour’s intercession. In verse 32 our Saviour says to Peter, to you, to me, to every sinner chosen in his love, redeemed by his blood, called by his Spirit, and saved by his grace, “But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.”

The Lord Jesus did not pray for Judas. He was the son of perdition. Therefore, when he was sifted, he fell through the sieve and fell into hell. Our Saviour did not pray for the world. But, blessed be his name, he says to us who believe, “I have prayed for thee”! Were it not for that fact, you and I would fall through the sieve, just like Judas, and fall with him into everlasting hell. But that shall never happen, no matter how often, how long, or how severely we are sifted. If Christ has prayed for us that our faith fail not, our faith shall not fail and we shall not fall into hell!

Read John 17 again, and remembering how he has prayed for you and prays for you, lift your heart to heaven with grateful praise.

When we are sifted, though Satan seeks to destroy our faith, though he seeks to rip us from the heart and hand of God our Saviour, all he does is separate the wheat from the chaff. The only thing that falls through the sieve is the dirt, debris, chaff, and rubbish of self-righteousness and legal religion, self-confidence and vainglory, self-reliance and presumed strength, carnal wisdom, and pride and judgmental severity.

That which falls through the sieve is everything of an evil, earthly, carnal nature. Everything that is not planted by our God in our souls. Everything that God himself has not breathed into our hearts, and made known to us by the power and grace of his Spirit fails us in the time of sifting. Everything fails except our God-given faith in Christ! Our Saviour said, “Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Matthew 15:13).

What sweet words these are: “But I have prayed for thee,
that thy faith fail not”! What does faith do when we are sifted? How does faith react to the sifting? Faith clings the more firmly to Christ alone! In fact, it is by our being sifted that our Lord calls for us to trust him the more (John 13:36-14:3). Faith hopes more completely in Christ alone, “Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Faith loves Christ more perfectly as the only and all-sufficient Author and Finisher of our faith, as the only and all-sufficient Saviour of our souls, as our only and all-sufficient Refuge and Hiding Place. These things are not hindered or hurt by the sifting, but shine forth more brightly. Peter, when he was sifted, did not cease to love and trust his Saviour, but loved him and trusted him more and with far greater humility than he had known or could have known before (John 21:15-17).

**Benefits Of Being Sifted**

Our Saviour said to Peter, “and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” He did not say, “if you are converted”, but “when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren”, assuring us that with every sifting, we shall be converted into instruments of greater usefulness.

Some have drawn the ridiculous conclusion from this statement that Peter was not converted before! That is not the meaning of our Lord’s words. The Lord Jesus had assured Peter that his confession of faith was made as the result of the revelation of grace, that his name was written in heaven, and that his sins were forgiven, and had sent him forth as a preacher of the gospel.

The meaning of our Lord’s words is, “when you are restored and brought back by my mercy, when you are brought forth out of the furnace like purified gold, strengthen your brethren.” Now, he was fit to minister to others. Now, he was to be made a blessing to others. Now, through his weakness, he was made strong, strong enough to strengthen his brethren.
Peter was a far better man after his sifting than before, a better and more useful preacher. He strengthened his brethren and continues to do so to this day! His boldness as a preacher inspired boldness in others. Peter’s utter devotion to Christ and his people, after his sifting, is held forth in the Book of God as an example for us to follow. What strength is given to his brethren by the epistles he was inspired to write for our learning, reminding us of the boundless mercy and grace of God flowing to us from electing love and blood atonement, pointing us to him who “bear our sin in his own body on the tree”, and setting our hearts upon Christ’s coming and the world to come!

May God the Holy Spirit seal the Saviour’s word to your heart and mine by his grace. “Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not. And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.”
“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me. 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. 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. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough” (Luke 22:31-38).

“He Was Reckoned Among The Transgressors”

There are many things revealed in these verses that we need to read often and lay to heart, asking God the Holy Spirit to graciously and effectually apply them to us continually.

Our great enemy, Satan, the prince of darkness, constantly seeks the everlasting destruction of our souls. He desires to have us. He is “a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour”. He is “the accuser of the brethren”. He constantly works evil in the
world, among men, and in the churches of Christ.
The great and only security of our souls from the adversary is
our Lord Jesus Christ, his power, his grace, his sacrifice, and his
mediation and intercession. He says to his own, “I have prayed
for thee, that thy faith fail not” (v. 32). “They that are with him
in heaven are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Revelation
17:14) because he has made them so.

When God’s elect fall, they shall be converted. The Lord
Jesus said to Peter, “when thou art converted”. There was no
possibility that Peter might not be restored (Malachi 3:6). “A
just man falleth seven times and riseth up again” because the
Lord raises him up by his grace (Proverbs 24:16), “for the LORD
upholdeth him with his hand” (Psalm 37:24).

We, who experience God’s grace, ought to take great
pleasure in helping one another, especially counting it our
privilege and honour to help those who are fallen. “When thou
art converted, strengthen thy brethren” (Galatians 6:1, 2).

Learn this too: We ought to devote all to Christ, and use
every reasonable means at our disposable for our Master, to
faithfully serve him (vv. 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.”

Our Lord’s words here are not to be taken literally, but as a
proverbial saying. Until our Saviour comes again, we are to
make a diligent use of everything God has given us. We are not
to expect miracles to be performed to save us from trouble and
labour. We are not to expect bread to fall from heaven into our
mouths, if we refuse to work for it. We are not to expect
difficulties and enemies to be overcome, if we will not wrestle,
and struggle and take pains. J. C. Ryle wrote …

“We shall do well to lay to heart our Lord’s words in this
place, and to act habitually on the principle which they contain. Let us labour, and toil, and give, and speak, and act, and write for Christ, as if all depended on our exertions. And yet let us never forget that success depends entirely on God’s blessing! To expect success by our own ‘purse’ and ‘sword’ is pride and self-righteousness. But to expect success without the ‘purse and sword’ is presumption and fanaticism. Let us do as Jacob did when he met his brother Esau. He used all innocent means to conciliate and appease him. But when he had done all, he spent all night in prayer (Genesis 32:1-24).”

Those are all very important lessons. We need to be often reminded of them. But, in this study I want to focus your attention on our Saviour’s statement in verse 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.”

Must Be
First, the Lord Jesus says, “that this that is written must yet be accomplished.” The scriptures speak of many things that simply must be; they must be because the Lord God has ordained them and declared that they must be. Let me remind you of just a couple of them.

There is a multitude of sinners in this world, who are the objects of God’s everlasting love and grace in Christ, who must be born again (John 3:7). The Lord Jesus did not simply say to Nicodemus, “You really should be born again”, or “You need to be born again”, or “I urge you to be born again.” Our Saviour said to Nicodemus “Ye must be born again”!

This is not a matter of speculation on my part. John tells us later on in his gospel (19:38-40) that Nicodemus came with Joseph of Arimathaea to beg the body of the Lord Jesus from Pilate, and made considerable sacrifice for his burial. At the appointed time of love and grace, Nicodemus was, according to
the purpose of God, born again.

I take Nicodemus to be representative of all God’s elect. The Lord Jesus says, concerning all chosen sinners, “Ye must be born again;” and they shall, every one of them, at God’s appointed time, be born again. This is a matter of absolute certainty, because it is a matter of absolute necessity.

Why must God’s elect be born again? What necessity is there for this? God’s elect must be born again because we need it. Though chosen and redeemed, though predestinated to eternal salvation, none of God’s elect can ever be saved apart from the new birth. Here are seven clearly revealed reasons why God’s elect must be born again.

1. We must be born again because we were all born wrong the first time (Psalms 51:5; 58:3). Because we were born wrong the first time, unless we are born again, we can neither see nor enter into the kingdom of God.

2. Every one of the elect must be born again because God, who cannot lie, promised it, before the world began (Titus 1:2; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 2 Timothy 1:9).

3. All the chosen must be born again because election demands it (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14). If even one of those chosen to salvation should fail to obtain salvation, then God’s election is meaningless, his purpose is useless, his love is worthless, and his Word is comfortless! If God cannot be trusted to do this, to save the people he purposed to save from eternity, he cannot be trusted to do anything (Ephesians 1:3-6).

4. God’s elect must all be born again, because predestination arranged it. Predestination is God’s appointment and arrangement of all things from eternity to secure the salvation of his chosen (Romans 8:28-30).

5. Every one of God’s elect must, without exception, be born again, because the sin-atoning blood of the Lord Jesus Christ has obtained it and demands it (Hebrews 9:12).

6. Every chosen, blood-bought sinner in this world must be
born again, because our God wills it. It is written, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Someone may ask, “How do you know that is what 2 Peter 3:9 teaches?” We know because 2 Peter 3:15 tells us so. “The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.”

7. All the chosen, all who were predestinated to eternal life, all the redeemed, all of them must be born again, because the Holy Spirit was sent here to do it (John 6:37-40, 44, 45, 63).

In John 4:4 we read that the Son of God must go through Samaria, because the time of love had come for a chosen sinner in Samaria. When the appointed time of love has come, the time in which the chosen, redeemed sinner shall be born again, then our great God and compassionate Saviour “must needs” go to where the chosen, redeemed sinner is and give life to the object of his love; and he shall. Election marked the house into which Christ must come. Predestination set the time of his coming. Blood atonement paved the road on which he would come. Providence brings him to the appointed house at the appointed time. Efficacious grace brings him in (Isaiah 55:11).

Here, in Luke 22:37 the Son of God tells us of the absolute necessity of his death upon the cursed tree as our Substitute. “This that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors.” The Son of God must die as he did, because the scriptures must be fulfilled (Psalm 22; Isaiah 53). The particular passage he quotes here is Isaiah 53:12.

“Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world with a commission, on a mission of mercy, under the bondage of
his own voluntary suretyship engagements, which he assumed for us as the Surety of the everlasting covenant (Hebrews 7:22; Matthew 1:21).

The death of our Lord Jesus Christ was no accident. It was not something which came to pass because of man’s free will, or because the Jews would not let him be their king! The Lord Jesus died at Calvary, because he must die at Calvary. As he himself declared, “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” (Luke 9:22).

The Necessity

The word “must” means “necessary” or “binding”. It is used to describe that which is absolutely vital. Why? What necessity was there for the death of the Son of God upon the cursed tree? Why must this Holy One be made sin for us? Why must this Saviour be put to death? Our Saviour has told us that his death as our Substitute was necessary, because the scriptures, which declared hundreds of years earlier, “he was reckoned among the transgressors”, must be fulfilled. But there are other things that made his sacrificial, sin-atoning death upon the cursed tree necessary.

The Lord Jesus Christ must die at Jerusalem as he did, because God the Father purposed it from eternity (Acts 2:23).

Our dear Saviour had to die at Jerusalem, in order to fulfil his covenant engagements for us. Our Lord Jesus Christ voluntarily assumed all responsibility for our souls in the covenant of grace; but once he assumed that responsibility, he must fulfil it. He is honour bound to do so (Genesis 43:8, 9; John 10:18; Acts 13:29).

It was absolutely necessary for the Lord Jesus Christ to die as he did upon the cursed tree, lifted up from the earth, in order for the holy Lord God to save us from our sins (Romans 3:24-26; John 3:14-17). If God would save us from our sins, he could
only do it this way, because righteousness must be maintained, 
sin must be punished, justice must be satisfied, forgiveness must 
be legitimate, and the love of God must be blameless.

The Lord God was not, in any way, compelled, by anything 
outside himself, to save anyone. But, having determined to save 
some of Adam’s fallen race, he could not do so except upon the 
grounds of justice satisfied. He was not compelled to save us. 
But, having chosen to save us, he could not do so except by the 
sacrifice of his own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. “By mercy 
and truth iniquity is purged.”

Have An End
Now, look at the last line of Luke 22:37. Our Saviour says, “the 
things concerning me”, all of them, all the things written of him 
in the Old Testament scripture, all things decreed from eternity 
concerning him, he said, “have an end”. That is to say, 
everything decreed, purposed, and written concerning me have a 
specific design, goal, and intent, a conclusion, a termination, a 
predestined result, and a divinely ordained finality.

When he who knew no sin was made sin for us, when he 
bearing our sins in his own body on the tree was made a curse 
for us, when he had suffered all the fulness of God’s wrath and 
justice as our Substitute, our blessed Saviour cried, “It is 
finished! ... Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” Then, 

he reverently bowed his head as an obedient servant, whose 
work was finished, presenting himself to the Father, and gave up 
the ghost. At that moment, all things decreed and written of him 
had achieved their goal and predestined result with finality, and 
came to their end, their conclusion, and their termination 
(Genesis 3:15; Psalm 22:12; Isaiah 53:5-12; Daniel 9:25, 26; 
Zechariah 12:10; 13:6, 7).

All the requirements of his engagements as our covenant 
Surety, all his obligation as our Surety ended. All the shadows, 
types, promises, and prophecies of the Old Testament scriptures
ended. The law of God ended (Romans 10:4). The fury, wrath, and vengeance of Divine justice was ended for him and for all his people. Jehovah declares to his chosen, “fury is not in me” (Isaiah 27:4). Judgment ended for his redeemed. Our sin and guilt before God ended (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; 2:13-17; 1 Peter 4:1, 2; Romans 8:1).

How we ought to rejoice and give thanks to our God for the fact that the designed purpose of our Saviour in coming into this world had its end (Matthew 1:21; Hebrews 10:10-14). “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him” (John 13:31).

**Another Must**

In the light of all this, let me show you one more thing that must be. In John 3:29, 30 we read, “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. He must increase, but I must decrease.”

Christ is the Bridegroom. “He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom.” Gospel preachers are friends of the Bridegroom. We stand before him. We listen for the Bridegroom’s voice and rejoice to hear it. Our joy is full when we are used of God to bring the bride and the Bridegroom together.

And the Bridegroom’s friend, every true servant of God, is anxious to turn honour and attention away from himself to Christ, the Bridegroom. This is the prayer, desire, and determination of every true, faithful servant of God. “He must increase; but I must decrease.” Christ is from heaven and is heavenly. We are just men of the earth, and earthly (v. 31). We will soon fade away. Christ is eternal. Christ is himself the Revelation of God. We are just his messengers (v. 32). Christ has the Spirit without measure. We have the Spirit as he is measured to us (v. 34). To believe me or any other man is
meaningless. To believe him is to seal this fact to your own heart, that God is true (v. 33). Christ must increase, because the Father has put all things in his hands (v. 35). Christ must increase, because he alone is our Saviour. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

“He must increase; but I must decrease.” The more I decrease, the more I delight just to stand before him and hear his voice. And the more I stand before him and hear his voice, the more he will increase before me, and I decrease before him.

Oh, let Christ increase and me decrease! We cannot be occupied with more than one thing at a time. Let us ever be occupied with Christ, and not with ourselves! The more we are occupied with him, the less we shall be occupied with ourselves.

Humility is not something we cultivate. Rather, it is something that comes from beholding the Lord Jesus Christ. The more I try to be humble, the more proud I become. But the more I stand in his presence, hear his voice, and behold him, the more I am occupied with him, the more humbled I am before him. “He must increase; but I must decrease”!
Chapter 45

“And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. 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. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. 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. And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” (Luke 22:39-46).

Agony In Gethsemane

We come now with the Son of God into his favourite place of prayer, the garden of Gethsemane. The word Gethsemane means “olive press”. What a fitting place Gethsemane was for the events which transpired on this dark, dark night. Here, the Lord of glory wept in agony of soul, prayed with a heavy, broken heart, and began to have his soul crushed in anticipation of being made sin for us. So heavy was the burden of his heart that the pores of his flesh poured with a bloody sweat!

I never read this passage and its parallels in Mathew, Mark, and John without a great sense of utter ignorance and inability.
How can a mortal man of sinful flesh comprehend what our Master experienced in Gethsemane? It is simply impossible. I will not attempt to expound the verses before us. That I know is a task too great for the man writing these lines. This passage contains things the wisest of faithful, godly men cannot explain. We will simply look at our Saviour and his disciples as they are set before us in this passage and, I trust, learn the obvious lessons here set before us by God the Holy Spirit.

Our Saviour’s Agony
What was the cause of our Saviour’s agony? What was the cause of this great heaviness and sorrow, this grief and agony of our blessed Redeemer’s soul? What was it that crushed our Master’s heart? What so greatly disturbed him? It was not the fear of physical pain, the fear of death, or even the fear of dying upon the cross.

It was not death on the cross that our Redeemer agonized over in Gethsemane. He stated very emphatically that he came for the purpose of dying as our Substitute upon the cursed tree. We should read the record of our Saviour’s agony here in light of his earlier temptation in the wilderness. After that temptation, Satan left him for a season, awaiting another opportunity to assault him (Luke 4:13). In Gethsemane the prince of this world launched his final assault upon the Lord Jesus. Just as he assaulted Adam in the garden of Eden, he assaulted the last Adam in the garden of Gethsemane. In Gethsemane the serpent bruised the heel of the woman’s Seed, and in Gethsemane the woman’s Seed again overthrew his assault.

That which crushed our Saviour’s heart was the anticipation of being made sin for us. The heavy, heavy burden which crushed his very soul was the enormous load of sin and guilt, the sin and guilt of all God’s elect which was about to be made his. Our Saviour’s great sorrow was caused by his anticipation of being made sin for us. “It was”, wrote J. C. Ryle, “a sense of the
unutterable weight of our sins and transgressions which were then specially laid upon him.” He who knew no sin was about to be made sin for us. He who is the only man who really knows what sin is, the only man who sees sin as God sees it was about to become sin. He who is the holy, harmless, undefiled Lamb of God was about to be made a curse for us. The holy Son of God was about to be forsaken by his Father.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, “began to be sore amazed”, to be in great consternation and astonishment, at the sight of all the sins of his people coming upon him, at the black storm of divine wrath that was gathering thick over him, at the sword of justice which was brandished against him, and at the curses of God’s holy law and inflexible justice, which, like thunderbolts of vengeance from heaven, were directed at him. In consideration of these things, our Saviour began “to be very heavy”! That which crushed our Saviour’s very heart and soul was the very thing for which he came into the world: the prospect of what he must endure as our Substitute.

The message of the Word of God, in its entirety, is Substitution. The Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate God, our Mediator and Surety, died in our place, in the place of God’s elect as our Substitute. By his own blood, when he was made sin for us, when he was slain in our stead, he satisfied the justice of God for us, magnified his holy law, made it honourable, and purchased for us the complete, everlasting forgiveness of all our sins. He died, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Christ died at Calvary so that God might be both just and the Justifier of all who believe. It is written, “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged” (Proverbs 16:7; Romans 3:19-28; Ephesians 1:7). Since the Lord Jesus Christ died as the sinners’ Substitute, since he has met and fully satisfied the justice of God for us, believing sinners have no reason ever to fear condemnation by God, accusation before God, or separation from God (Romans 8:1-4, 31-39).
It was the enormous load of our sin and guilt which crushed our Saviour’s heart in Gethsemane (Isaiah 53:4-6).

**Sin’s Ignominy**
What a horrible, monstrous, ignominious thing sin must be! Nothing so displays the exceeding sinfulness of sin as the death of our Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. When the holy Lord God found sin on his own darling Son, he killed him. God poured out all the unmitigated fury of his wrath upon his own darling Son, when he found sin upon him, and forsook him. Those facts ought to startle every human being. They assure us that if God finds sin on us, he will do the same thing to us forever. Let us never look lightly upon sin.

**Christ’s Prayer**
What is the meaning of our Lord’s prayer in verse 42? “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” In his time of great heaviness, sorrow, and distress, we find our Lord Jesus in prayer. What an example he sets before us. The first one to whom we should turn in every time of trouble is our heavenly Father. Our God should be the first to hear the words of our complaints. He may or may not relieve us of our trouble; but it is good for our souls for us to unburden our hearts at the throne of grace. There, and only there will we discover the all-sufficiency of his grace (Hebrews 4:16; James 5:13).

But what was our Lord praying for in the garden of Gethsemane? Let us never rush in where angels dare not tread. I will not entertain idle curiosity about the things of God, especially when discussing the heart-wrenching agony of soul endured by the Son of God to save us. Still, this agony of soul, which the Lord Jesus endured for us, is recorded in all four gospel narratives. Matthew and Mark both tell us that our Saviour uttered this prayer in much the same words three times.
As we have seen, Luke adds the details about his bloody sweat and an angel coming to minister to him.

“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. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. 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” (Matthew 26:39-42).

While the apostle John does not specifically deal with our Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane, he does give us a hint at the meaning of his prayer. In John 12 we see our Saviour in a similar position and experience six days before the betrayal in Gethsemane (John 12:23-33). Here we see our Saviour in great agony of soul. His agony was clearly related to his death at Calvary. Yet, he set his face stedfastly toward the cross without flinching.

While he certainly has his death at Calvary in mind, our Lord Jesus, obviously, was not asking that he might be kept from that appointment for which he came into this world. He had come to this place on purpose, that he might be betrayed by Judas, arrested, and hanged upon the cross by the hands of wicked men as our covenant Surety (Hebrews 10:1-10).

If the Lord Jesus was not praying to be saved from dying in our place as our sin-atoning Substitute, what was he praying for his Father to do here? Our Lord was here once more under the assault of hell. Satan was making his last effort to keep him from fulfilling his Father’s purpose of grace in redemption. He was doing everything he could to keep the Seed of the woman from crushing his head.

I have no doubt at all that our Saviour, being overwhelmed with the prospect of being made sin, in this state of soul agony,
was (as a man) fearful of dying before he had finished his work, before he reached the cross. He was fearful of dying in the garden of Gethsemane (Hebrews 5:7).

We must never forget that our Lord Jesus is both God and man in one glorious person. As God he could never know fear. Yet, he could not be a man tempted in all points like as we are if he did not know fear.

These two distinct natures in Christ, the divine and the human, are obvious throughout the gospel narratives, especially in those passages dealing with his temptations, sufferings, and death. Here in Gethsemane we see the man Christ Jesus begging for relief from this great trial of agony. Yet, his submission and resignation to the Father’s will is submission and resignation to his own will as God. “The hour” from which our Lord prayed for release was not the hour for which he had come into the world, but this hour in the garden. “The cup” he prayed might pass from him was not the cup of his Father’s wrath to be poured out upon him at Calvary. That cup Jehovah’s Servant took with determinate purpose and resolve. The cup he wanted to pass from him was the fear of dying in the garden before he could take the cup of his Father’s wrath and drink it for us.

Our Lord’s Example
What a remarkable example our Lord Jesus set before us of submission to the will of God. “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done” (v. 42).

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye 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 that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:21-
This is the highest measure of practical godliness and holiness. Let men brag and boast to themselves, as they may, about their imaginary godly deeds. The surrender of my will to God’s will in all things is godliness. Godliness is bearing patiently whatever my Father sends, desiring only what my God has purposed, wanting nothing but what he wills, preferring pain to pleasure, if that is my Father’s will. Nothing can make us happier in this world than submission to the will of God. And nothing brings us so much heartache and misery in this world as having our own way. May God give us grace to willingly submit to his will: his eternal will of predestination, his revealed will in scripture, and his accomplished will in providence. Let us ever say, with Eli of old, “It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.”

Our Shame
What shameful, fickle, slothful, sinful creatures the very best of God’s saints are in this world. We have a painful illustration of this fact in the slothful indifference of Peter, James, and John in verses 45, 46. “And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow, And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.” But we have an even more painful illustration of it in ourselves. We all far too often sleep when we ought to pray, ignore our Lord when he is near, and quickly let slip those things we ought to hold fast.

All who are born of God, so long as we live in this world, are people with two diametrically opposite, warring natures (Romans 7:14-23; Galatians 5:17; Psalm 73). The spirit is ready and willing; but the flesh is sinful and weak. Therefore, we must ever watch and pray. We must always be on guard, as soldiers in hostile, enemy territory, knowing that there is a malicious traitor within. We must fight the battles daily. We must wage warfare
against our flesh daily. Our rest is yet to come (1 Thessalonians 5:14-24).

Give Thanks
If you will read Mark’s account (Mark 14:41, 42), you will see what great reason we have to give thanks to our dear Saviour for his stedfast resolve as our Surety. “And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough.” Our Lord Jesus was saying, “It is done. This trial is over. I have finished the work of my obedience.”

“The hour is come.” Now the appointed hour of my death, the appointed hour of your redemption is come. Now I must finish the work my Father gave me to do for you. I must go yonder to die in your place! Did you catch those last three words in verse 41? “It is enough”! He said, “Sleep on now, take your rest it is enough”! His obedience is enough. His blood is enough. His grace is enough. He is enough. Therefore, we can take our rest in him.

“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” (Luke 22:3-6).
“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. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him. 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” (Luke 22:47-53).

The Betrayal

That which is contained in these verses is both sad and solemn. It is a subject full of serious warning to every hypocrite. Yet, it is a subject that is instructive and comforting to believing sinners. Here the Holy Spirit describes the betrayal of our Saviour by Judas Iscariot, showing us how our sovereign God and Saviour used the deeds of the most infamous man in history to accomplish his purpose of grace in the redemption of his elect and to fulfil the scriptures in his death.
Judas Iscariot

“Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot.” First, let me tell you something about this horrible man, Judas Iscariot. There were four men named Jude, or Judas, in the New Testament.

Jude, the brother of James and half brother of our Saviour, who wrote the Epistle of Jude (Matthew 13:55). This man was the Judas who asked the Saviour, “Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” (John 14:22).

There is another Judas mentioned in Acts 9:11, who lived on Straight St. in Damascus, at whose house Ananias met Saul of Tarsus, after the Lord Jesus had revealed himself in that man chosen of God to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

There was a third Jude, or Judas, who was surnamed Barsabas. He was sent by the apostles to the church at Antioch, after the conference at Jerusalem (Acts 15:22-30).

And here is Judas Iscariot, the traitor, the betrayer of our Lord. His name was Judas; but he was, by divine providence, surnamed Iscariot, which means “the man of murder”. It had been better for this man if he had never been born. Of him our Saviour said, “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! good were it for that man if he had never been born” (Mark 14:21).

“Then”

“Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot.” It is important to notice the time God the Holy Spirit identifies for us when Satan is here said to have entered into Judas. This was two days before the passover. It happened while our Saviour was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper (Matthew 26:2-17; Mark 14:1-11). In fact, Mark’s account seems to indicate that the thing Satan used to trigger Judas’ wickedness was the devotion of the woman who anointed the Saviour with precious spikenard for his burial, and the Master’s commendation of her good work.
Immediately after our Saviour commended this woman and her work, Judas “went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them” (Mark 14:10).

John tells us that this happened before the supper in Simon’s house ended (John 13:2). While they were at the table in Simon’s house, you will remember, the Lord Jesus arose from the supper and washed his disciples’ feet. (This was not at the Lord’s Supper, but at the supper in Simon’s house in Bethany.) Then, the Saviour told the disciples that one of them would betray him. When they wondered which of them would do the horrible deed, he said, “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. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly” (John 13:26, 27). Though the Lord Jesus had spoken very plainly, the disciples failed to realize that he had identified Judas as the betrayer. But Judas “having received the sop went immediately out” to betray him (John 13:30).

Immediately following the supper at Bethany, while Judas was making his dastardly deal with the chief priests, the Lord Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to prepare for the passover. Then, when the appointed hour arrived, “he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him”, to keep the passover feast (Luke 22:14; Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:17). Our Saviour kept the passover feast with his disciples, as was required by the law (Luke 22:15-18). In verses 19, 20 he established the gospel ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, by which God’s saints in this gospel age remember the Saviour and symbolically “show the Lord’s death, till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26).

**Judas At The Table**

I have said all that because I want you to see, and to see clearly, that Judas was at the table with the Lord Jesus and his disciples when the Lord’s Supper was established. In verses 21 and 22 we
are plainly told that after making his hellish deal to betray the Son of God, Judas was present with the twelve and kept the first observance of the Lord’s Supper with them. The Lord Jesus said, “Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed”! What a base, crass, hard-hearted hypocrite Judas must have been! Apparently, he came only to cover his tracks; but there he is sitting with the Son of God and his apostles as the Saviour established the blessed ordinance of sweet communion, just as though he was part of the communion!

This is important because there are multitudes who would have us “fence the table”, or not observe it at all, lest someone eat the bread and wine with us who is an unbeliever. Some would even keep other believers from the table. Such practices are terribly evil.

Be sure you understand what the scriptures teach regarding the Lord’s Supper. Like believer’s baptism, it is a blessed, gospel ordinance of worship; and, like baptism, it is an ordinance to be observed by believers only. If you do not trust Christ as your Saviour, if you do not discern the Lord’s body (That is to say, “If you do not know why Christ came into this world and what he accomplished, if you do not know your need of him as your sin-atoning Substitute.”) you must not join God’s children at the Lord’s Table. The ordinance is not for you. To eat the bread and drink the wine without such God-given discernment is to eat and drink damnation to yourself.

But, if you are a believer, if you do trust Christ alone as your Lord and Saviour, the Table is prepared and set for you. No believer is unworthy to receive the bread and wine in remembrance of the Saviour. In fact, every believer is specifically told to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of the Saviour, and to do so often (Matthew 26:26-28). The observance of the Lord’s Supper is no more
optional than believer’s baptism. It is just as evil to refuse one of the Lord’s children their place at the Table, as it would be to refuse baptism to one to whom he has given faith in Christ.

Who makes the decision? Who decides who shall eat the bread and drink the wine? The scriptures tell us plainly. Each person must examine himself. You, and you alone, are to determine whether you are a sinner whose only hope of salvation and eternal life is the crucified Son of God. It is not the pastor’s responsibility, or the responsibility of the church’s elders or deacons. It is the responsibility of the individual, and no one else, to determine whether he does or does not trust Christ as his Saviour.

The Lord Jesus knew that Judas was a devil from the beginning, and knew that he had already made arrangements to betray him for thirty pieces of silver. He spoke so pointedly to Judas about these things, that he had no excuse for his hellish hypocrisy. But the Master did nothing to keep that devil from eating the bread and drinking the wine.

“One Of The Twelve”
We are told that Judas was “of the number of the twelve” (v. 3). He was “one of the twelve” (v. 47). Those twelve men formed the most elite group of men ever to walk across the face of the earth. Yet, “one of the twelve” apostles of Christ was Judas Iscariot, Judas the murderous traitor. When the Lord chose Judas to the office of an apostle, he knew he was a devil (John 6:70-71). When the Lord Jesus commissioned the others, Judas was commissioned with them. When our Saviour sent out the twelve to cast out devils, heal the sick, and preach the kingdom of God, Judas was among them (Luke 9:1-6). It seems to me that Judas must have even performed the same miracles that the other apostles performed; else he may have been detected by them.
Gracious Designs
All this was done, though the Lord Jesus knew exactly who and what Judas was. Rather than questioning these things, we ought to immediately recognize that our Saviour had wise and gracious designs in them. Judas was a man specifically raised up to stand as a glaring beacon to warn all men, telling all that outward religion without inward grace is not only useless, but damning. Judas was chosen to be a preacher and even an apostle. No doubt, he preached exactly the same doctrine as Peter, James, and John, the very doctrine that Christ preached. But Judas was a devil. He was never born again. He was never called to life and faith in Christ by God the Holy Spirit. Judas was never made a partaker of Christ and a partaker of the grace of God.

He was nothing but an outward, empty hearted professor of faith in Christ, not a possessor of grace. He was an apostle (a messenger of God) in name only. Peter said he was “numbered with” the apostles and had “obtained part” of their ministry (Acts 1:17). He obtained part, just an outside part of the apostles’ ministry, no more. He had the name and the office, the duties and the doctrine, the fame and the functions of an apostle, but nothing more. He had no grace in his heart and no gifts of the Spirit. Those who heard him preach heard cold, dry, empty echoes of a cold, dry, empty heart.

I fear there are multitudes like Judas today who fill the pulpits of churches. They are ordained by men, but not by God the Holy Spirit. They are talented, but not gifted with grace. They are forceful, but not faithful. Their doctrine may be profound and precise, but it is not pure. It may elevate your thinking, but it will not edify your soul. It may swell your head, but it will not sanctify your heart.

Such a man was Judas. He was a devil from the beginning and remained a devil to the end, though he was numbered with, and constantly associated with the apostles to the end of his days, until the measure of his iniquity was filled. Then, he went
“to his own place” (Acts 1:25). We should never be surprised by the appearance of such men, or surprised that they go undetected, even by the faithful (Matthew 7:22, 23).

No Harm
Judas also stands as a constant, blessed beacon of light, proclaiming forever that all Satan’s devices and all the deeds of even the most malicious men shall never hurt God’s cause, injure his people, or hinder the gospel. The Apostles were not hindered in their work because Judas was among them. The disciples were not harmed by his presence at the Table. Our Saviour was not hindered, but only helped in his determination to redeem us by Judas’ betrayal. In fact, it was Judas’ fall from the number of the twelve that made room for the twelfth true apostle, the apostle Paul.

In choosing Judas to be an apostle and allowing a devil to sit at the Lord’s Table with his disciples our Saviour assures us that his saints are not polluted or harmed in anyway because a Judas is among them. The Lord’s true disciples did not lose a thing because Judas was among them. They had Christ with them. Their joy was not diminished because Judas was there.

If, indeed, the Lord Jesus meets with us when we gather to worship him as he promised (Matthew 18:20), we will suffer no loss if a devil dares try to hide himself from God among the sons of God (Job 1:6). If God the Holy Spirit will lead us “by the footsteps of the flock”, where the Good Shepherd feeds his sheep (Song of Solomon 1:8), our souls shall be blessed with his flock, though there may be a goat or two among the sheep, or a lion lying in wait. He will prepare a table for us, even in the presence of our enemies, anoint our heads with the oil of grace, and cause our cups to run over.

Wheat And Tares
Yes, our Saviour had wise and gracious designs in his use of
Judas. He knew that his church, so long as we are in this world, would never be free from false apostles, false preachers, and false prophets. And he knew that tares would grow together with the wheat until the harvest. Goats will ever be found among his sheep in this world. Wherever the good fish are gathered by the gospel net, carps will be gathered, too. And this is exactly according to his purpose. Yet, the “precious and the vile” are still perfectly distinct, and between them there is “a great gulf fixed”. Tares will never become wheat. Goats will never become sheep. And bad fish will never become good fish. The seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent cannot be mixed.

**Betrayed With A Kiss**

Skip down to Luke 22:47. The Lord Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane. He has finished praying. When he arose from prayer, he found Peter, James, and John “sleeping for sorrow” (v. 45). When he did, he said, “Rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation” (v. 46). Read verses 47-54.

“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. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him. 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. Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house.
**A Multitude**

Here is a multitude of Roman soldiers armed with swords and spears, and Jews with the chief priests, with Judas leading the way. “Judas was guide to them that took Jesus” (Acts 1:16). But, why would such a huge multitude come to arrest one unarmed man? Were they afraid of him? It appears that they were. It is obvious that the soldiers, as well as the Jews, had heard that this man claimed to be more than a mere man. He claimed to be God in the flesh; and his disciples all worshipped him as God. We know that the soldiers were aware of this, because one of them later declared, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

It is certain that none of the princes of this world really knew him, “for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8). Yet, these men knew that he openly claimed to be “the Lord of Glory”, and feared that he might be. And he showed them that their fears were justified (John 18:4-8). It is obvious that though Judas was determined to betray him, he was terrified of him. Matthew tells us that he told the soldiers as soon as they saw him kiss the Lord Jesus, they should hold him fast (Matthew 26:48).

**Total Depravity**

Why did he use such precautions? There was in that devil of a man a terrifying conviction that Christ was more than man. He could not have forgotten the miracles of Christ. He had seen the Master escape from the hands of his enemies, when they sought to throw him over the hill of the city (Luke 4:29-31). Therefore, he told them to bind him and lead him away securely (Mark 14:44).

These men, all of them, must have been terrified as they led the Saviour out of Gethsemane. They all had seen and heard enough that night to convince them that this man is God. Our Lord took the initiative, approaching them with not the slightest
twinge of fear. He had declared, “I AM”, and they fell away backward before him. He picked Malchus’ right ear up off the ground and replaced it before their eyes.

They knew who they were dealing with, and must have been nervous and afraid. Yet, such is the deadness and depravity of the human heart that sinners cannot act contrary to the evil determination of their own wicked hearts and wills, unless they are graciously compelled to do so by God the Holy Spirit. Even when stricken with terror, they cannot and will not repent, except God give them repentance. If we know, by the sweet experience of his grace, what it is to repent, what it is to trust Christ, our hearts ought to constantly bow before him with gratitude and dance before him with joy!

**Christ In Control**

Though bound like a criminal, our Lord Jesus Christ was in absolute control, even of this mob. He was overruling their malice for his own glory that the scriptures might be fulfilled. Our sovereign Saviour was, by the use of these wicked men, accomplishing the prophecies of the Old Testament scriptures. He was taken by force, but not by the force of these men. He was taken captive by them by the force of his own determination to die in our place upon the cursed tree, and to do so exactly according to the scriptures.

According to the scripture, he had to be betrayed by one who was familiar with him and called his friend, one in whom he confided, one who had eaten of his bread (Psalm 41:9). According to the scripture, the sacrifice for sin had to be bound. Therefore, our Saviour voluntarily stretched out his hand to be bound by sinners (Psalm 118:27). As Isaac was voluntarily bound and laid upon the altar, our blessed Saviour was, by his own voluntary will, bound by these wicked men that the scripture might be fulfilled.
**Jews And Gentiles**
This wicked band of murderous men was a mob of rebels, composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Though utterly unconscious of the fact, they were visibly and undeniably fulfilling that which was written of them in the 2nd Psalm hundreds of years earlier. We know that the actions of these men was the fulfilment of the 2nd Psalm, because the Spirit of God specifically tells us that is the case in Acts 4:24-28.

“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 thy 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 determined before to be done.”

**Brought To The High Priest**
In verse 54 Luke says, “Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest’s house.” When they came to arrest our Saviour in the Garden, it was the intention of this mob to deliver him up to the Romans, to give him a mock trial, and murder him. These soldiers did not come representing the Jews’ or their high priest. They were Roman soldiers. Why, then, did they take him first to the high priest?

Again, though they had no idea what they were doing, they acted directly contrary to their own inclinations to fulfil the purpose of our God. Roman soldiers would not willingly do anything just to please the despised Jews over whom they ruled. And they probably acted in direct disobedience to their orders. These men were the Roman governor’s soldiers. It is highly
unlikely that the governor sent them out with orders to arrest the Lord Jesus and take him to the high priest’s house. It seems to me that he would have ordered them to bring the Lord Jesus directly to him.

Why, then, do you suppose they took him to the house of the high priest? If you will read the 1st chapter of Leviticus, you will see that the sacrifice for sin had to be brought first to the priest. Why did they bring Christ first into “the high priest’s house”? They did it that Christ might die for our sins according to the scriptures, that the scriptures might be fulfilled.

Christ our Passover, our Sin-offering, our Sacrifice, had to be bound and led away, as all sacrifices under the law were, to the high priest. And both Jew and Gentile had to be involved in the great work. So they dragged the Lord Jesus to the high priest, then to the Governor, and then to Pilate, and at last to Mount Calvary, where he was crucified by the hands of wicked men, according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, “according to the scriptures” (Isaiah 53:5-12).

“His Own Place”
When he had done that for which he was ordained, that for which his vile, base heart lusted, this hard, impenitent rebel, Judas, the man of murder, went to his own place in hell, and that by his own hand. We are specifically told, “Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Matthew 27:3-5; Acts 1:18-25).

What a horrible death Judas died! Being condemned in himself, he committed suicide, hanging himself. Then, “falling headlong, he burst asunder, and all his bowels gushed out.” What a spectacle! How just! Then he went to his own place in hell. Imagine if you dare, what has followed. Throughout the unimaginable miseries of eternity, Judas is forced to endure, to the everlasting torment of his soul, the unceasing condemnation of his own guilty, damning conscience. In the screeches of the
damned, this fire burns in his soul and this worm never dies, Judas’ own conscience ceaselessly screams, “Would God I had never been born! Would God I had never been born! I am justly damned forever! I am the man who betrayed the Lord of life and glory with a kiss”!

**Christ’s Appointed Place**
Yet, it was by the hand of Judas, the man of murder, that the Lord Jesus Christ, our blessed Saviour, went to his appointed place, at his appointed time, and finished his appointed work as our Saviour. Here he justified us with his own blood, forever put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself, and obtained eternal redemption for us, dying “for our sins according to the scriptures.”

**Our Own Place**
The end result of all this is glorious. Because Christ took our place at Calvary, because he was made sin for us, we have been made the righteousness of God in him; and soon we shall be brought, by his omnipotent grace and immaculate mercy, into our own place with him in heaven at last!

What will be your place? Will you be brought down to your own place in hell by your own hands, by your wilful, obstinate rebellion refusing to bow to the Son of God? Oh, may God graciously save you from yourself by his grace, give you life and faith in his darling Son, and sweetly force you to enter into life eternal by Christ the Door. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Trust the Son of God now; and soon he will bring you to your own place, the place prepared for you from the foundation of the world, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.
“Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high
priest’s house. And Peter followed afar off. And when they had
kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down
together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld
him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and
said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying,
Woman, I know him not. 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
affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he
is a Galilaean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou
sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And
the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. 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

A Great Sinner And His Great Saviour

Because it is describe in great detail by God the Holy Spirit in
Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it is obvious that Peter’s fall and his
recovery by the Lord Jesus Christ is a matter of great
importance, and one that we need to have repeatedly impressed
upon our hearts and minds. May God the Holy Spirit be our
Teacher as we go over the inspired history of this sad event.
Here is the tremendously instructive record of a great sinner and
his great Saviour.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God. Were it merely an uninspired book of religion written by men, the gospel writers would never have told us that Peter, one of the Lord’s apostles, denied his Master three times. What are we to learn from this sad, yet encouraging event in the life of God’s servant, the Apostle Peter?

Declining Steps
First, we should observe that Peter’s great fall was preceded by gradually declining steps. His great sin was preceded by lesser evils. The steps of his demise are clearly identified by the inspired historians, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

First, Peter displayed terrible pride and self-confidence. Though all the other disciples might deny the Saviour, Peter boasted that he would never do so. He openly boasted that he was ready to go with the Lord Jesus both to prison and to death. Then, when the Lord Jesus told him to watch and pray, lest he enter into temptation, Peter was found sleeping. Third, Peter was vacillating and indecisive. When Judas, the chief priests, and soldiers came to arrest the Son of God, Peter immediately fought for his Master bravely. Then, he ran away. Then, he returned. Then, we see him following the Saviour; but “Peter followed afar off”. Next we see this man, who was the object of God’s everlasting love and boundless, immutable grace, mingling with his Saviour’s enemies. He went into the high priest’s house and sat down among his servants, warming himself by their fire, hoping to hide himself among them, hoping he would not be identified as one of the Lord’s disciples by his enemies. He sat among godless, reprobate men, committing the most wicked deeds ever performed by men, hearing the filth gushing from their hearts, as they cast accusation after accusation against the Lord of glory, and he wanted to be identified not as a follower of Christ, but as one of them! Finally, Peter was overwhelmed with
fear and denied the Lord Jesus three times.

Let us beware of the little foxes that spoil the vine (Song of Solomon 2:15). What a sweet and tender precept this is! How very needful! Foxes are used to represent the subtle, less open, less obvious sins and corruptions lurking in us, like those cunning creatures, hiding in silence, waiting to catch their prey.

Foxes also represent cunning, false prophets hiding themselves among God’s saints (Lamentations 5:18; Ezekiel 13:4). Satan never more cunningly and, perhaps, never more effectively deceives men, than when he transforms himself into an angel of light and makes his ministers ministers of righteousness.

The vines the foxes would destroy are the Lord’s people, believers, having tender grapes. What is more tender than a tender conscience? What can be more easily wounded? Let us ever look to Christ, the Lord of the vineyard, for grace against these destructive enemies to our souls’ welfare. Let us ever be keenly aware of the fact that our greatest watchfulness and most fervent prayers, without his watchful eye and gracious protection, can never protect us from these shrewd, cunning foxes. Let us never cease to ask our Saviour to protect us from these foxes and destroy them before us. Robert Hawker wrote:

“Lord, I would say, keep me from every enemy which doeth evil in thy sanctuary, and preserve alive, in flourishing circumstances, all those tender graces of thy Spirit bestowed upon me, that I may bring forth fruit to the praise of thy holy name, and may flourish and spread abroad as the cedar in Lebanon.”

And let us never cease to give thanks for the sweet assurance that though the foxes would destroy the vine, if they could, they never shall, because the Lord Jesus himself keeps his vine!

**Inward Corruption**

Here is another thing we all prefer not to think about, but
something we should constantly remember. None of us know what vile corruptions are hidden deep in our hearts and what horrible deeds we might commit in a moment, if the Lord did not keep us from acting according to what we are. Like you and me, Peter knew he was a sinner. He confessed it. “Lord, depart from me. I am a sinful man.” But like us, Peter had no idea how sinful he was. I am sure he never dreamed he could do the things he did in the high priest’s house that night.

You and I need to be constantly aware of this fact. There is no evil in the world that is not in us. And there is no evil thing we will not do in a heartbeat, if the Lord God leaves us to ourselves. Peter was a great man, a great Apostle, a great believer. He was faithful and courageous, a man who truly loved and trusted the Son of God; but he was just a man, a sinner saved by grace, nothing more.

Whether we know it or not, we carry within us a boundless capacity for evil. There is no enormity of sin into which we will not run, if we are not held from the evil that is in us by the hand of God’s omnipotent grace. When we read the falls of Noah, Lot, and Peter, we only read what would befall ourselves, if the Lord did not prevent it. Let us never presume. Let us never indulge in high thoughts about our own strength, or look down upon others who have fallen. May God the Holy Spirit graciously and constantly teach us to “walk humbly with God”.

No Effectual Means
Third, the story of Peter’s fall teaches us that no means of grace will effectually serve our souls, unless the means is made effectual by God’s Spirit. I would say nothing to minimize the use of outward means. God uses outward means. But the means are meaningless, without the blessing of God upon them and the work of his Spirit by them.

Not only is that true, but it is equally important for us to understand that no past experience will secure our souls from
present evil. Peter was an apostle of Christ; yet, he fell. Peter had seen and performed great miracles; yet, he fell. Peter once walked on water to the Saviour; yet, he fell. Peter had seen the transfigured Christ; yet, he fell. Peter had just heard the greatest sermon ever preached (John 14-16); yet, he fell. Peter had been warned by the Master; yet, he fell. Peter heard the cock crow, reminding him of the Saviour’s warning; yet, he fell, persisting in his downward course.

Amid all these distinguishing mercies, and forewarned as he was by Christ, he not only denied Christ, but persisted in the denial, though the first crowing of the cock told him of his treachery. Still, he went on in his wickedness, fully aware of what he was doing! How often we hear the Word of God, or read it, hearing the very voice of God, as Peter did when he heard the crowing of the cock in the early hour of the morning, and totally ignore his voice. We will never heed it, except the Lord graciously causes us to hear it, as he caused Peter to hear the second crowing of the cock.

Peter was in the immediate presence of his Saviour; yet, he fell! No means of grace is a means of grace, without the workings of God’s grace upon us and in us. The only thing that distinguishes us from others is the distinguishing grace of our God. The only righteousness we have is Christ; and the only thing that keeps us is the grace of God.

**Peter’s Recovery**

What should we learn from Peter’s recovery? For one thing, we should learn that when we fall, we have no ability to recover ourselves. When Peter heard the rooster crow the first time, how alarmed he must have been. Yet, he went on to even greater wickedness. Even when he heard the second crowing, he was unaffected, until “the Lord turned and looked upon Peter”.

What a look that must have been! The Lord turned to Peter. Peter did not turn to the Lord. He looked upon Peter, not in
anger and disgust, but in mercy, love, and grace. That look was a look of tenderness, compassion, and faithfulness. What a great, gloriously, indescribably great Saviour our dear Lord Jesus is! His love for us is great. His grace to us is great. His faithfulness is great. His forgiveness is great. His righteousness is great. His atonement is great. His keeping is great. And his restoration is great. Peter had gone back to his nets and boats, sure that he was reprobate; but the Lord Jesus would not let him go (Mark 16:7; John 21:15-17).
“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? 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, 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. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth” (Luke 22:63-71).

Majesty On Trial

While our Lord Jesus was before Caiaphas in the dead of night, before the Sanhedrim had been fully gathered together to hold their trial at daybreak, our dear Redeemer was treated with the utmost cruelty and abuse. His enemies were so anxious to condemn him that as soon as he was brought into the high priest’s house, they began tormenting him, as they blasphemed. Then, early in the morning, the Jewish Sanhedrim gathered to condemn the Lord of Glory. That is what is described in this portion of holy scripture.

Like wild beast, or enraged savages, “The men that held
Jesus mocked him, and smote him.” They vented their utmost hatred upon the “man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” His tormentors had no pity for him in their hard, calloused hearts. None were found to vindicate his character, or plead his cause. No man stood with him. There were none to pity him.

What gross cowards these men were! Cruelty is always the badge of cowardice. They were the very same men who in the garden, “went backward, and fell to the ground”, when our Lord said, “I AM.” They went out, with swords and staves, to take him prisoner. Yet, they fell to the ground when he simply spoke a single word to them. But now they think they have him in their power. He stands before them as a sheep before her shearers; and they are determined to be as cruel as possible in tormenting him.

Yet, even this record of their cruelty is set before us in the Word of God that we, through patience and consolation of the scriptures, might have hope. Blessed Holy Spirit, whose Word we have read, be our Teacher and show us wondrous things out of thy law this hour, for Christ’s sake.

**God In Great Humiliation**

First, we have before us a vivid picture of that which the Apostle wrote concerning God our Saviour, when he said, “he humbled himself”! Here is God, the eternal God of Glory, in great, indescribable humiliation.

“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? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him” (vv. 63-65).

There stands Jesus of Nazareth, God in human flesh, the God-man our Mediator. I will not attempt to picture him. No artist’s brush can paint the picture. No mortal tongue can describe it. But, here God the Holy Spirit paints a picture of our
Saviour’s humiliation with words of infinite skill, in the eloquence of simplicity, without the slightest hint of overstatement.

May God the Holy Spirit give us eyes to see him who was tormented in the high priest’s house on that dark, dark night. Do you see him standing before his implacable foes, clothed with a seamless garment, bound, delivered over to the officers, and now surrounded by them, as they mock him, scoff at him, and beat Him? Let your eye rest on him. Set your heart on him. There he stands, our Saviour, very God of very God. What do you see?

I see Omnipotence held captive. The Spirit of God speaks of “the men that held Jesus”. Is God held prisoner by men? Yes, he was. The man they held is himself “over all God, blessed forever”, the Creator of heaven and earth. “All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.” He was, at that very moment “upholding all things by the word of his power.” In all his weakness and in all his sufferings, he was still “over all, God blessed forever.”

Though mocked, beaten of men, and blasphemed, the holy angels adore him. Surely, there is something wondrous in this! Omnipotence held captive! He who can create or destroy, according to the good pleasure of his own will, took upon himself our nature, and in that nature sank so low as to become subject even to the very utmost cruelty of man. What a wondrous stoop of condescension! The omnipotent God allows himself to be bound, and never proves himself more truly omnipotent than when he permits himself to be held as a prisoner by sinful men. Our omnipotent God became the captive prisoner of wicked men, that wicked men held in the captivity of their own sin and guilt might be set free. The Lord Jesus Christ went into captivity that he might lead captivity captive and set us free.

Behold the Man again. This man is the glory of God.
Looking stedfastly on him, I see glory mocked, for “the men that held Jesus mocked him”. They could not see his glory, because they were blind, and because he veiled his glory, hiding it from them. But the angels of God beheld it. And because he has revealed it to us and given us eyes to see, we behold his glory, “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

It is amazing to me that the God who reigns in glory over myriads of holy angels should be mocked by miscreants, who could not even have lived for a second in his presence if he had not given them life and sustained them in it. Yet, there he is; he who made the heavens and the earth, despised and rejected of men, treated with the utmost scorn and mockery.

His glory was mocked that we might be glorified together with him, we who have so horribly mocked his glory! What is sin, but the mockery of the glory of God? While I am indignant with those men who so mocked my Saviour, I am even more indignant with myself for all the mockery I have heaped upon his glory! Oh, how I have mocked him!

Behold the man again. Looking upon my Saviour as he stands silently before his tormentors, I see goodness smitten; perfect, infinite, unutterable goodness stricken, bruised, assailed, assaulted, and smitten. “The men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him.” To smite wickedness is an act of justice; but to smite goodness is an abomination (Proverbs 17:15). The Son of God who stood there had within his soul mercy which endures forever. Yet, they smote him. There burned in his holy heart a love which many waters cannot quench, and which the floods of waters cannot drown. Yet, they smote him! He had come to bring peace and goodwill to men, and to set up a kingdom of joy and love, of righteousness and peace. Yet, they smote him!

Never was goodness so good as when our blessed Saviour, the good and the just was smitten, not of men, but of God, that all the goodness of God might be ours in him (Proverbs 17:15; 1
Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Oh what great goodness there is here! He was “smitten of God and afflicted. 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”! Yet, again my heart is compelled to cry, How very grievously have I smitten him, even in his own house!

I see something else here. I see omniscience blindfolded. “When they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?” Of course, omniscience can never be blinded. Yet, here is God in human flesh blindfolded. Why did our Saviour endure this indignation? What is the meaning of this? Why is it written here? I do not presume to think I know the answer to such questions fully. Yet, when I see omniscience blindfolded, and hear these men ask the God of Glory who smote him, Numbers 23:21 comes to my mind. By the sufferings and death of Christ, the God of Glory has been, in absolute justice, forever blinded to our sins, so blinded that he does not even see us as the sinners who have smitten him! Blessed be his name forever, “he hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.” The precious blood of Christ has so thoroughly blotted out our sins that God does not behold iniquity in Israel!

**Indescrivable Depravity**

Next, look at our Saviour’s tormentors. In the actions of these men, I see a terrible, but clear portrayal of the indescribable depravity of humanity, the indescribable depravity of your heart and mine.

There is much talk these days about the will of man. Some fools even talk about man’s “free will.” Here are men, religious men, the temple guards, acting in the dark of night, acting not by order, not by law, not by the influence of others, but acting by the impulse of their own will. The things they did to the Son of
God draw an ugly, but unmistakably clear picture of the nature of man and the nature of his will. They have God himself in their hands. What will man do in his time of utmost liberty and freedom? “And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him” (vv. 64, 65). Oh, what enmity fallen man has for God! How utterly depraved we are! Fallen man hates God. Ours is a race of rebels who defy God’s justice. We defy his omniscience. We are a people whose lives are lives full of blasphemies and insults to the Almighty. Fallen man is more relentlessly cruel than any wild beast.

**Majesty In Misery**

Yet, I see something else here. I see majesty in my Saviour’s misery. Amid all this evil there stands God our Saviour, glorious in majesty, wonderful in goodness, majestic in glory. As a sheep before her shearsers is dumb, he opens not his mouth. No flush of anger appears on his face. No glare of wrath shoots from his eyes. He bore it all, bore it in his very soul, with Divine patience, the very patience of “the God of patience”. He bore all in patience, knowing that he bore these things from men by the will and hand of his heavenly Father. “Never man spake like this Man”, when he spoke not a word! What an example he sets for us to follow (1 Peter 2:21-24).

Our Saviour was triumphant in submission. Submitting to the will of his Father, his persecutors could not make him give way to anger. They could not destroy his devotion. They could not keep him from doing all that he came to do for us. No, the strong-souled Christ persevered in his merciful work until he had accomplished our redemption by the Sacrifice of himself.

**Obstinate Unbelief**

“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, 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” (vv. 66-68).

They were determined not to believe in him and receive him. Their unbelief was wilful and obstinate. They defied that which was clearly and indisputably set before them. Therefore, our Saviour said, “Ye will not believe.” This is the great evil that lies at the root of most men’s sins, they believe not in Jesus Christ, whom God hath sent. It is this of which the Spirit of God convinces men, as our Saviour foretold concerning him: “He will convince the world of sin ... because they believe not on me.” Yet, there is nothing more reasonable, nothing more worthy to be believed than the revelation God has given of his Son to us in the holy scriptures.

**Christ My God**

Behold the man again. I see Christ my God confidently declaring his everlasting glory as our Saviour.

“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. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth” (vv. 69-71).

Our Saviour plainly asserted that Daniel’s vision (Daniel 7:13, 14) would be fulfilled in him, thus asserting that he is God our Saviour, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God. These religious rebels heard the word out of our Saviour’s own mouth. Yet, they would not believe. What a glaring proof these men are that faith is the gift of God.

**Love In Labour**

Behold the Man one more time. Here I see love in labour. All this shame and suffering was endured by our Saviour because of
his great love for us, because of the joy that was set before him, the prospect of giving us eternal life and salvation. “He loved me, and gave himself for me.”

Let every believing sinner take this personally. For you, as much as if there were no other person in the whole universe, for you, the King of glory became the King of scorn, and bore all this shame and misery. For you, as your Substitute, he bore it all, and indescribably more, when he was made sin for you. He shed his blood, laid down his life, bore all the wrath of God, sacrificed himself and made atonement for you, for your sin! For me! For my sin!

“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.” What does that mean? It means that the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ shall never be discovered a miscarriage. Every sinner for whom he died shall be saved. His soul’s travail shall not be in vain! Yet, it means more. It means that when he has brought his ransomed home to glory, he shall be satisfied with you. He shall be satisfied with me. And we shall be satisfied with him forever!
“And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate. And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King. And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it … But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children … And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots … And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. 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” (Luke 23:1-46).

“How I pray that the Lord God will be pleased to grant me grace that I may live with the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ever before my mind, with the scenes of my Saviour’s redemptive
work and glory constantly upon my heart, and the redemption he accomplished for me by his substitutionary death ever flooding my ransomed soul. Let’s go again to Mount Calvary, asking God the Holy Spirit to inscribe the things we see here upon our hearts for the glory of his own great name, for Christ’s sake. What a scene of infamy we have before us! What a scene of grace! What a scene of the revelation of the glory of God!

Our Lord’s Humiliation

The Lord Jesus was hurriedly brought before Pilate, where the Jews slanderously accused him. But Pilate saw their accusations for what they were, nothing but the ranting of envious religionists. Once he found out the Lord Jesus was a Galilean, he tried to rid himself of the matter and sent him to Herod. When Herod could not persuade the Son of God to dance before him, he mocked him shamefully and sent him back to Pilate. And that day, those two political jackals became friends. And Pilate, willing to please the Jews, “delivered Jesus to their will” to be crucified. Pilate, Herod, the high priest, the Jewish mob, and the soldiers were but contemptible little imps, unworthy of further mention. There is but one thing worthy of notice in these verses, one thing they were written to reveal and that is the greatness of our Lord’s humiliation for us.

What base contempt and mockery our God and Saviour endured in the house of the high priest, and at the palaces of Pilate and Herod! Truly, “he humbled himself”! He emptied himself of all the dignity and honour that rightly belongs to him, that he might redeem and save sinners who deserve to be forever mocked in the fires of hell and held in contempt by him. “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” (2 Corinthians 8:9).
Depravity And Substitution
In verses 13-25 the Spirit of God gives us a terrible, graphic display of the utter depravity of our race and the vile hatred of the human heart for the God of Glory! What base, self-serving weaklings men in powerful positions often are! Pilate and Herod cared for nothing but themselves. Both, though men of almost absolute power in their realms, cowered before the people they ruled, just to gain a moment of approval from them. The whole crowd, religious and reprobate, Jewish and pagan, craved to murder the incarnate God. And Pilate “delivered Jesus to their will”. What an indictment this is against the will of man!

Yet, there is something glorious here. We read in verse 17 “For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.” By the arrangement of divine providence, there was a custom, and a man, in the scene before us who gave opportunity for our Lord to display everything he had come to accomplish. When Barabbas was released and the Lord Jesus died in his place, it is as though the Saviour had said, “See this! This is why I came to this hour, to die the Just for the unjust in the place of guilty sinners as their Substitute that they might go free”!

Weep Not
Luke is the only gospel writer who recorded the things written in verses 26-31.

“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. And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.
For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?”

It is not surprising to see these women weeping. It is shocking that those few women were the only ones who wept, as they beheld the Lamb of God surrounded by hell-hounds craving his blood. Yet, when the Saviour saw their tears and heard their cries, he said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.” He desired no pity. He was not a helpless sufferer, but Jehovah’s voluntary Servant, now performing his final deed of obedience. Yet, he looked upon the nation that was about to murder him with tender pity, as he anticipated the judgment that nation was heaping upon itself.

Three Malefactors

“And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left” (vv. 32, 33).

It is not by accident that Luke wrote, “And there were also two other malefactors (two other violators of the law), led with him to be put to death.” The obvious indication is that our blessed Redeemer was one of three malefactors. “He was reckoned among the transgressors” (Luke 22:37). “He was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many” (Isaiah 53:12). “And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors” (Matthew 15:28). Being our Surety and Representative, he stood before the offended law and justice of God as the greatest of all malefactors!

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to 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 imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. 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. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

Seven Statements
As he hung upon the cursed tree, bearing our sin, suffering all the horrible fury of the wrath of God for us, when he was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, the Lord Jesus made seven distinct statements which should ever be held in fond memory in our hearts.

There have been mountains of words and thousands of sermons preached from these seven sayings of Christ from the cross. I cannot add anything to what has already been spoken and written by faithful men. But I do hope that God the Holy Spirit will enable me to give you a glimpse of what I see in them. These are the very words spoken by our great God and Saviour in his humiliation, spoken as he engaged the forces of hell and endured the indescribable wrath of God in the place of sinners. In these seven words from the cross I see the glorious Person, work, and offices of our Lord Jesus Christ beautifully demonstrated.

A Word Of Forgiveness
The first of those seven statements is found in Luke 23:34. “Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.” Here I see Christ our Mediator, our High Priest and Advocate pleading for the forgiveness of guilty sinners. Here is the Son of God suffering by the hands of wicked men, suffering with wicked men, suffering as a wicked man, and yet praying for the men
who made him suffer. “There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men”, and that Mediator is “the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

We must have a Mediator (Hebrews 5:1). The Mediator must be a man of God’s choosing (Hebrews 5:4, 5). The Mediator must pray and be heard (Hebrews 5:7). He must have a sacrifice. Christ’s sacrifice was himself, his own life, his blood, his body and his soul! The sacrifice must be offered upon the altar of God. The Altar upon which our Saviour sacrificed himself was the Altar of his own Divinity. And the Mediator must have a blessing to bestow. That blessing is God’s salvation (Numbers 6:24-26). None but the Lord Jesus Christ meets the qualifications of a mediator between God and men (John 14:6; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1, 2).

A Word Of Assurance
The second word is found in Luke 23:43. The dying thief cried, “Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom”! “And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Here is a word of salvation and assurance spoken to a believing sinner by Christ our Saviour and King.

Even as he hung upon the cross, suffering untold agony under the wrath of God, Jesus Christ reigned as Lord and King over everything. Do not ever imagine that our Lord Jesus was in anyway the helpless victim of circumstances when he died at Calvary. Even in his death, he was the God of all circumstances and all events. Here is the sovereign King, the Ruler of the Kingdom of God, saving whom he will (Romans 9:15). Here is the King of Grace opening the door which no mere man can ever open. Here is the Prince of Peace giving peace that no man can give. Here is the King of Glory promising mercy and eternal life that no man can merit. “Salvation is of the LORD”! Grace comes from the throne of grace; and the King who sits upon that
thronethrone is the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:22; John 5:20, 21; 17:2).

A Word Of Tender Care
The third word spoken by our Lord as he hung upon the cross is found in John 19:26, 27. Here I hear Christ, our Representative and Example, speaking a word of tender care.

“When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.”

Even in the agonies of death, under the penalty of sin, enduring the wrath of God, fulfilling the everlasting covenant, accomplishing eternal redemption for us, and satisfying the Divine justice, our Lord Jesus Christ did not neglect the responsibilities of manhood. Our Saviour, as our Representative and Example, deliberately gave attention to his responsibilities as a man, even in the time of his dying agony.

Our blessed Saviour fulfilled all righteousness for us, both as our Representative and as our Example. He did everything that it is right for a man to do. He was circumcised. He was subject unto his parents. He was baptized. He attended the synagogue. Our Lord Jesus was “made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law.” And in his dying hour, our Redeemer tenderly cared for his mother.

He fulfilled all righteousness as our legal Representative (Romans 5:19; and he fulfilled all righteousness as our Example of Righteousness (John 13:13-15; 1 Peter 2:21-24). If we would learn how to live in this world for the glory of God, if we would learn how to serve our generation, if we would learn how to worship God, we must go to Calvary. There we behold the Lamb of God and learn how to be a man. There we learn what submission to the will of God involves. At Calvary we see
patience in suffering, learn how to love our brethren, how to love our family (Ephesians 5:25-27), and how to give (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Yet, there is more here than our Lord’s care for his mother. When our Saviour said to Mary, “Woman, behold thy Son”, I cannot help thinking that he was saying, “Behold me now, and remember what I told you when I was just a boy, ‘I must be about my Father’s business.’ Behold me now, and remember the song you sang when I was still in your womb” (Luke 1:46-55).

A Word Of Agony
The fourth word is found in Matthew 27:46. “And about the ninth hour (at 3:00 in the afternoon, after three hours of great darkness) Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”

Here I see Christ our Substitute crying out in agony of soul. This is the only time recorded in scripture that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke to the Father as God. Here he takes the lowest place of humanity and cries out to his Father and our Father as a creature to be pitied by his Creator. In his great agony, this mighty Man who is God reverts to his childhood, speaking in his native Syrian tongue, not in the Hebrew of his fathers or in the Greek he acquired as he matured.

At the height of his obedience to the Father, the Lord of Glory was forsaken by his Father, because we deserved to be forever forsaken of that God whom we have spent our lives forsaking. He was forsaken of God, because he was made sin for us. Reproach now broke his heart.

“My God! My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?” This is a cry arising from depths of infinite anguish no human being can know. This cry no mortal mind can comprehend. This mystery no creature can fathom. Martin Luther, after studying and meditating upon this text for hours, closed his Bible, slammed
his fists down on his desk and cried, “God forsaken of God! My God, no man can understand that”!

I will not attempt to explain what no man can understand. But, with a happy broken heart, I rejoice in the fact of this our Substitute’s greatest sorrow. He was forsaken of God. That means those sinners for whom he died shall never be forsaken of God (Isaiah 53:9-11; John 3:14-16; Romans 5:6-8; 8:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:20, 21; 1 Peter 2:24, 25; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 4:9, 10).

What an infinitely, horribly evil thing sin must be! How holy, just, righteous, and good our God must be! O my soul, how great, how infinitely great is the love of God for his people! How anxious, willing, and ready the holy Lord God is to save poor sinners! “He delighteth in mercy”!

A Word Of Great Need
Our Lord’s fifth word from the cross is found in John 19:28. “After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.” Here is Christ the Man expressing his great need and desire. Here we see our Saviour’s real humanity. This is the shortest of the seven statements he made on the cross; but it is every bit as instructive as the other six. I am sure it is meant to show us at least these three things about our Saviour.

His body’s thirst: being in anguish of body, burning with fever, his tongue swollen and cleaving to his jaws, he thirsted for water, just like the rich man in hell, as he endured the fire of God’s hot, holy wrath for us.


His heart’s thirst: the Lord of Glory was made sin, made to endure all the horror of God’s holy, unmitigated wrath, because he thirsted for the souls of men. He thirsted for his people. He
thirsted to be thirsted after. When I hear the Master cry, “I thirst”, I can almost hear his heart crying, “I will that they also whom thou hast given Me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.”

A Word Of Accomplishment
“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a spunge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost” (John 19:28-30).

“It is finished”! What a blessed, triumphant word! Our blessed Saviour was not crying a sigh of relief. He was not saying, “At last, it is over.” Most men leave this world with things unfinished. So many plans unfinished! So many hopes unfulfilled! So many desires unsatisfied! So many works incomplete! So many things they wanted to do, or see, or experience, unfinished! Not so with the Lord Jesus Christ, our great Surety! He accomplished everything he came here to do.

What did he come here to do? Did he come here to do the Father’s will (Hebrews 10)? “It is finished”! Did he come here to save his people (Matthew 1:21)? “It is finished”! Did he come here to fulfill all the types, promises, and prophecies of the scriptures? “It is finished”! Did he come here to make an end of sin? Did he come here to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself”? It is finished”! Did he come here to bring in everlasting righteousness? “It is finished”! Did he come here to obtain eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12)? “It is finished”! Did he come here to redeem us from the curse of the law? “It is finished”! Did he come here to fulfil and make an end of the law? Did he come here to magnify the law and make it honourable? “It is finished”!
This is the Surety’s cry of accomplished suretyship to the Father. “It is finished”! “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do”! Here our Covenant Surety says to his Father, I have finished all the work entrusted into my hands, I have redeemed all the souls entrusted to me. I have ransomed all the sheep. I have found all the lost ones I came to find. All the work is fully done, well done, perfectly done! This is the cry of our great Surety to poor, needy sinners! “It is finished”! Wrath is finished! Judgment is finished! Sin is finished! Righteousness is finished! Redemption is finished! Justification is finished! Sanctification is finished! Salvation is finished! Thomas Kelly wrote:

“It is finished”! Sinners, hear it:
Hear the dying Saviour’s cry;
“It is finished”! Angels Sing it,
Sing the praise of Christ on high.
“It is finished”! “It is finished”!
Tell it through the earth and sky!

Justice now demands salvation
For those souls whose wrath Christ bore;
And it smiles with approbation
On the ransomed evermore!
Grace and mercy, grace and mercy
Freely flow from boundless stores.

Hear the Son of God declare it,
All is done he came to do!
Needy sinners, Hear, believe it.
Is not this good news to you?
“It is finished”! “It is finished”!
All is done! Oh, yes, it’s true!
“It is finished”! All is over.
Jesus drank damnation dry!
Never can a ransomed sinner
God’s salvation be denied!
“It is finished”! “It is finished”!
Cries our Surety now on High!

Who is he that shall condemn us?
Who shall charge us now with sin?
It is God who justified us,
Christ who died, cries in our name,
“It is finished”! “It is finished”!
Praised forever be his name!

A Word Of Rest
The Saviour’s last word from the cross is found in Luke 23:46
“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.” Our Saviour died with the Word of God in his heart and on his lips (Psalm 31:1-5). Here I see Christ our Sabbath entering into rest. Once our great Redeemer had finished his work, he “cried with a loud voice, and said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” Thus he entered into his rest and obtained eternal rest for us (Hebrews 4:9-11).

Notice here, our Saviour who had cried, “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” now calls his Father by that endearing name, “Father”. The storm of God’s holy wrath beat fiercely upon his holy soul; but now the storm is nearly over. Only one thing is to be done. He must yet die; but here he seems to say to poor, needy sinners, “Look here. Look unto me. Behold, now reconciliation is made. Anger is turned away. Judgment is gone”! (Read Isaiah 12:1-6.)

Our blessed Saviour committed his spirit into his Father’s
hands, not Satan’s. Some vainly imagine that the Lord Jesus was now taken to hell to be tormented of the devil for three days. That is not so (Hebrews 9:12). He owed Satan nothing. Here he conquered the fiend of hell forever. He committed his spirit into his Father’s hands, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:22-24).

At last, in sovereign majesty, “he gave up the ghost”. He dismissed his spirit. This Man who is God our Saviour did what none but God, who gives life and takes life at his will, could do. “He gave up the ghost.” That is to say, he dismissed his spirit that we might come now to him and enter into his rest (Matthew 11:28-30).
“And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate … (For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.) And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas … And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. 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 … And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left” (Luke 23:1-33).

Barabbas: A Picture Of Substitution

Of all the doctrines taught in the Word of God, none is so vitally important as the doctrine of substitution. Men everywhere talk about the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. They speak much about Christ, the sinner’s Substitute. But their language is vague. And very few people understand what the Bible teaches about substitution. In the historic narrative given in Luke 23:1-33 we have a clear illustration of the nature of Christ’s death. It was a substitutionary sacrifice and atonement. The innocent died in the place of the guilty; and the guilty must go free.

Background
You are all familiar with the story of Barabbas. It is recorded by all four of the gospel writers. During the days of Israel’s
subjection to Rome, a strange custom was regularly practised. On the day of the Passover the Roman governor released a guilty prisoner. No doubt, this was intended to be an act of benevolence on the part of the Roman authorities toward the Jews. The Jews probably accepted it as a significant compliment to their Passover celebrations. Since on that day the Jews were themselves delivered out of the land of Egypt, they may have thought it a most fitting thing for some prisoner to obtain his freedom.

Since some prisoner must, by the arrangement of Divine providence, be released on the Day of Atonement, Pilate thought that he now had opportunity to allow the Saviour to go free, without compromising himself in the eyes of his superiors at Rome. So he asked the people which of the two they preferred, a notorious criminal or the holy Saviour. Without hesitation or dissension, the crowd cried for the release of Barabbas and the death of Christ. Pilate’s last effort to release Christ had failed. “And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. 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” (vv. 24, 25).

Who Barabbas was we do not know. His name signifies “his father’s son.” Some suggest that there is an indication here that he was particularly and specially the son of Satan. Others suppose Barabbas was an endearing name, a name given to him because he was his father’s darling, a child indulged by his father, or as we would say “his daddy’s boy”. Certainly, there is a warning here for us. Overly indulged, spoiled children are the most likely persons to become injurious to society, a grief to their parents, and curses to all around them. Looking at the cases of Eli’s two sons, Absalom, and Barabbas, we are warned as parents not to be excessive in the indulgence and pampering of our children.
Substitution
At any rate, Barabbas appears to have committed at least three crimes. He was imprisoned for robbery, sedition, and murder. We might well pity the father of such a son. This wretch was brought out and set in competition with the holy Son of God; and the poor inhabitants of Jerusalem were so hardened in their unbelief and sin, so thirsty for the innocent blood of Christ, that they preferred this obnoxious creature to the man who is God’s own Fellow!

This fact is very significant. There is more teaching in it than we might realize at first glance. In this act of freeing the guilty and binding the innocent, we have a vivid example of salvation by substitution. The guilty is set free and the innocent is put to death in his place. Barabbas is spared, and Christ is crucified. We have in this striking event a display of the manner in which God pardons and justifies the ungodly. He does it because Christ has suffered and died in their stead, the Just for the unjust.

We deserve to die for the punishment of our sins; but a mighty Substitute has suffered our punishment. Eternal death is our due; but a glorious Surety has died for us. We are all in the position of Barabbas by nature. We are guilty, wicked, condemned, and shut up under the law. But when we were without hope and without strength, “in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” And now God, for Christ’s sake, can be just and yet “the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26).

Two Birds
In the Old Testament rite of cleansing lepers, two birds were used. One bird was killed, and its blood was poured into a basin. The other bird was dipped into the blood, and then, with its wings covered with crimson, it was set free to fly into the open air. The slain bird typified our Saviour whose blood was shed at Mount Calvary. And every soul that by faith is plunged into
the ...

    Fountain filled with blood,
    Drawn from Immanuel’s veins,

... is set free, owing his life and liberty to the Saviour who was once for sinners slain. That is substitution. It comes to this: Barabbas must die, or Christ must die. You the sinner must perish, or Christ, the immaculate Lamb of God, must be slain. Behold, the Incarnate God dies that we may be delivered. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered in the place of sinners like Barabbas, satisfying the wrath and justice of God; and, like Barabbas, all those sinners for whom Christ made satisfaction must go free. I want you to see four things about this man Barabbas.

A Guilty Man
The first thing I want you to see is the fact that Barabbas was a man guilty of many offences. We sometimes say that a man is “as guilty as sin”. Barabbas was as guilty as sin. His life was a life of riotousness and sin. He was tried in a court of law and found guilty of robbery, sedition, and murder. As such he is a fair representative of all men by nature. We could all be named “Barabbas”. We are all the sons of our father Adam. His image, his nature, and his character are reflected in us all.

    Like Barabbas, we are all rebels. Barabbas stirred up sedition. He was a revolutionary. That is a modern name for rebels. He would not submit to authority. This is the problem with our race. We are proud, self-willed rebels. We hate authority.

    In our father Adam, we rebelled against God’s command. We are born with a rebellious nature. In pride and self-will, we rebelled all the days of our lives against God’s throne. We sinfully rebel against God’s holy law. Man acts like he does simply because God says, “Don’t do that.” Man sees the good
and refuses to do it simply because God says, “Do it.” And we are stedfast and persistent in our rebellion.

As children, we rebelled against parents and teachers. As adults, we rebel against moral and civil authority. Even as believers, we have a nature within us that rebels against everything holy and good (Romans 7:14, 15, 18).

And like Barabbas, we are all robbers. It was Adam’s determination to rob God of his authority, of his creation, and of his glory. And that is what man does by his sin. We have robbed God of his glory, refusing to worship him. We have robbed God of his honour, refusing to believe his Word. We have robbed God of his creation, stealing that which God has made for himself and using it for ourselves, without regard to him. We have robbed ourselves and our children of the blessedness of our original creation, fellowship with God, the image of God, true freedom, the favour of God, and of life itself. Through our sin and rebellion our race is reduced to nothing but emptiness and vanity. Once we were princes of God’s creation. Now we are empty handed thieves (Ephesians 2:11, 12).

Yet, there is more. Like Barabbas, we are all murderers. In the course of his rebellion and robbery, Barabbas had committed murder. So have we all. There is not a guiltless one among us. We have all committed multiple murders in our hearts. Envy, hatred, anger, wrath, and malice are in the eyes of God’s law equal to murder (Matthew 5:21, 22). We have infected our children with the deadly disease of sin. Sin is a plague of the heart. It is a family disease passed on from generation to generation. What is more, we are all guilty of the blood of the Son of God. Yes, we are guilty of slaughtering the Lord of Glory!

We must never forget what we are by nature. There is no evil deed, or atrocious crime, or infamous sin recorded on the pages of human history which does not reside in the heart of every man, woman, and child in the world (Matthew 15:19). We all
might be most properly named “Barabbas”! We are all the descendants of Adam. We are all of our father the devil. We are all, by nature, “children of wrath, even as others.”

**A Condemned Prisoner**

In the second place, Barabbas was a prisoner under the sentence of the law. Barabbas had been found guilty. The sentence was passed. He must die. On the day when the Jews observe their Passover, two thieves will be crucified. And Barabbas will be crucified in the midst of them, for he is the vilest of the three. Take him away. Bind him hand and foot in the prison until the day of his execution.

Picture Barabbas in the prison. He expected very soon to be taken out, nailed to a cross and hung up to die, as the just payment for his crimes. He was held under the sentence of the law. That is just the condition of every person in the world by nature (John 3:36; Romans 3:19; Galatians 3:10, 22, 23; Ephesians 2:3).

Man’s bondage is as cruel and terrible as it is sure. Men today like to boast of their independence and freedom. People think, “I’m going to do my own thing.” But they are only doing exactly the same thing that men have been doing throughout history. Man is not free. He is in bondage. He is in bondage to religious tradition, social custom, and peer pressure. And man by nature is in bondage to sin. He is in bondage to his own sinful nature and the lusts of his own corrupt heart. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jeremiah 13:23). Men are taken captive by Satan at his will (1 Timothy 2:26). Man by nature is prone to every kind of evil. It is only the restraining grace of God that keeps any of us from the wicked things we pretend to abhor.

Fallen men and women, without Christ, are bound under the chains of darkness. Your will is held in captivity by the fetters of
iniquity. You have resolved many times to change. You may have even succeeded in reforming your outward behaviour somewhat; but your character, your nature, your will is in bondage, helpless and hopeless!

Christ alone can set prisoners free! “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”! We were “such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron.” Then we cried unto the Lord in our trouble, and he saved us out of all our distresses. He brought us out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke our bands in sunder (Psalm 107:10-14).

 Fallen man’s sentence is fixed and immutable. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die”! God has spoken. There is no reprieve. There is no amnesty. There is no repeal. God’s law says the sinner must die. God’s holiness says the sinner must die. God’s justice says the sinner must die.

Man by nature is under the sentence and curse of God’s holy law. The law of God demands your death. You are not on probation. You are on death row. The God of heaven judges you guilty. Your own conscience consents to the verdict. The sentence is passed. The only thing lacking is the appointed day of execution. We died spiritually in our father Adam (Romans 5:12). And every unbelieving sinner must die eternally, because of God’s immutable law. Every sinner out of Christ is dead at law.

Is there therefore no hope for a sinner like Barabbas? Must all the guilty forever perish? Will God not have mercy? Is there any way whereby God can be faithful to his holy law and yet pardon sin? Is there any means whereby God can both satisfy his justice and let the sinner live? God will not show mercy at the expense of his justice. But he will show mercy if justice can be satisfied in a Substitute. Blessed be the name of the Lord, there is hope for sinners, for God has found a Substitute (Job 33:24).
A Substitute Found
So mark this third fact and rejoice. A Substitute was found to die in Barabbas’ place. The Roman soldier came and unlocked Barabbas’ prison door, took off his shackles, and said, “Barabbas, you’re free to go. Jesus of Nazareth is going to die in your place.” That is real substitution. That One who suffered and died as Barabbas’ substitute is our Substitute. His name is Jesus Christ, the Lord. He is God’s own, well-beloved Son. He is the only Substitute God can or will accept (Romans 3:24-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24).

The sinner’s Substitute must be a suitable person, able and willing to redeem. Whoever undertakes to reconcile the holy God and sinful men must himself be both God and man. He must be God, for only God is able to make infinite satisfaction. And he must be man, for man must be punished. Behold, the God-man, our Saviour. Being God he is able to redeem. Being man he is able to suffer. Being the God-man he is an all-sufficient Redeemer, both able and willing to save!

In order to be a Substitute for others, our Redeemer must be perfect and sinless. “He knew no sin.” The Lord Jesus Christ suffered the just punishment due to our sins, as our Substitute. He was made sin for us. He made our sins his own! Oh, wondrous grace! God took his darling Son without the camp. He hung his Son up in our place between two thieves. God forsook his well-beloved Son. He killed his Son! And he buried the body that bore our sin. And by a marvellous transfer of grace, the Lord God has made Christ’s perfect righteousness our righteousness. We have been made the righteousness of God in him.

Barabbas Set Free
Now, in the last place, I want you to see that because Christ died in his place, Barabbas was set free. Jesus Christ took Barabbas’ place at Calvary. Therefore Barabbas did not die. There is a
glorious truth here. All of those for whom the Son of God died at Calvary must be set free.

It is not possible for the law to punish my Substitute and punish me too. Not one soul for whom Jesus Christ died shall be found in hell. The cross of Christ can never be discovered a miscarriage. The blood of Christ cannot be spilled in vain. “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.” I am talking to you about real substitution. Any doctrine that teaches that God will both punish Christ and those for whom Christ died is not substitution and is not the gospel.

If Christ has my discharge procured,  
And freely in my room endured  
The whole of wrath Divine:  
Payment God cannot twice demand,  
First at my bleeding Surety’s hand,  
And then again at mine!

Augustus M. Toplady
“And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, he saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. 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. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 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. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:32-43).

Lessons From Calvary

Let us go again with our blessed Saviour to that horrible scene of sin and woe, that blessed, glorious scene of mercy, love, and
grace, just outside the city of Jerusalem. I have before my mind’s eye the scene of three crosses, three criminals, soldiers, priests, a religious crowd, all gathered to slaughter the Son of God. Scattered among the others, I see a few weeping women, and in the distance, one or two heart-broken men. There is much to be seen here on the very surface. But there are other things hidden beneath the surface and unobserved by men. I see before me something of the character of God, much about the character of man, a great display of substitution, God’s great salvation, a tremendous picture of sin pardoned, a sad picture of sin unpardoned, a Saviour despised, a Saviour embraced, a sinner forever lost, and a sinner forever saved. I have found a few lessons in this passage that I pray the Spirit of God may be pleased to graciously apply to our hearts.

How deep, bitter, universal, and vile is the hatred of the human heart for God!

“Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:7).

Oh, how fallen man hates God! We see it in the priests and the scribes. We see in the soldiers and the people. Hatred echoed through Pilate’s judgment hall. Malice rang in Herod’s court. Envy was the motive behind every word and deed performed on that infamous night by wicked men. The arrest, the scourging, the mockery, the spitting, the smiting, the cries of “Crucify him! Crucify him”!, the wagging of heads, the drunken songs, the nailing, the thieves’ railing, everything was but the outpouring of man’s utter hatred for God.

Here we see what is in every human heart by nature. The heart of man is enmity against God. Man declared his heart in the crucifixion of God’s darling Son. Here is fallen man showing himself openly, making an unconscious confession of his hatred of God.

It was man who erected the cross and nailed the Son of God to it. God gave the wild ass’s colt his reins and seems to have
said, “Vent the feelings of your heart.” And he did, taking God by the throat, as it were; man snatched the only begotten Son of God from his Father’s heart, and crucified him with hellish delight.

Reckoning the death of the cross the worst of all deaths, man says, “This is the best way to show my contempt for God. This is exactly what I think of the Son of God.” Thus, the enmity of the natural heart speaks out, and man not only confesses publicly that he is a hater of God, but he takes pains to show the intensity of his hatred. He glories in his shame, crying aloud, “Crucify him! Crucify him”!

The cross interprets what is in man’s heart. The cross rips the mask of pretended religion off of the face of our race. The cross of Christ exhibits man’s heart as a cesspool, overflowing with the malignity of hell.

Most would say, “I don’t hate God. I may be indifferent to him. He may not be in all my thoughts; but I don’t hate him”! If that is so, let men explain their daily crucifixion of the Son of God. What is man’s wilful unbelief, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh? What is rebellion to Christ, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh? What is blasphemy, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh? What is man’s mockery of Christ, but the crucifying of the Son of God afresh?

Will you dare look at your hands? They are red, dripping with blood! Whose blood is that? It is the blood of God’s own Son! Blood you shed continually in your heart, because you hate God, because you really want to be God yourself!

Reading these lines, you may think I am being harsh. You may retort, “How dare you judge me”! I am not judging you. It is the cross that judges you. I am asking you to judge yourself by it. It is the cross that interprets your purposes and reveals the thoughts and intents of your heart.

Oh, what a revelation of man the cross is! Man hating God, and hating him most, when God displayed his love most fully.
Man acting like the devil, taking Satan’s side against God. Yes, the cross was a public declaration of man’s hatred for God and his Son. The cross is proud man spitting in God’s face and saying, “I am holy. I need no Saviour. To hell with God and his Son”! Our Saviour asked, “What think ye of Christ?” Man’s answer was, “Crucify him”! Man’s heart, his hands, his tongue all combine to scream out hatred for God and his Son. Everything I see in man on Calvary’s hill is hatred, utter hatred for God, the hatred of the human race toward the triune God. That is what your unbelief is: hatred for God and his Son (1 John 1:7-10; 5:10).

What a horribly evil thing sin must be, if it takes the blood of God’s own Son, the death of heaven’s Darling to put it away!

What must sin be when, in order to expiate it, the Lord of Glory must die upon the cursed tree as an outcast, a criminal, a curse? What a horribly evil thing sin must be! It is rebellion against God, treason against his throne, man’s attempt to rape and defile the holy Lord God, to drive the Almighty from his throne, to murder the Eternal Son.

Sin is the expression of fallen man’s enmity against God, the display of our natural heart hatred of God. Sin is that which makes us obnoxious to the holy Lord God. Sin is the defilement of our race. Sin has brought us under the curse of God’s holy law. Sin has put us under the sentence of death, eternal death. Sin shuts the door of hope upon all the human race.

It is no easy thing for sin to be put away. No carnal sacrifice can put away sin (Hebrews 10:1-7). Isaac Watts wrote:

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain.”
No work of man can put away one sin. No amount of repentance can put away sin. Not even our faith can put away sin. Toplady said in *Rock of Ages*:

> Not the labours of my hands  
> Can fulfil Thy law’s demands;  
> Could my zeal no respite know,  
> Could my tears for ever flow,  
> All for sin could not atone;  
> Thou must save, and Thou alone!

Even God himself cannot, in his pure, absolute character as God, put away sin. If sin is to be put away, it must be put away by the sin-atoning death and substitutionary sacrifice of the incarnate God, the God-man Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ.

But his sacrifice was enough. He died but once; and once was enough. That is the meaning of these words. “Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Christ’s sufferings and death for sin are of infinite value, merit, and efficacy. Therefore, he suffered for sin only once. He appeared once in the end of the world to put away sin; and he has done it.

Our Lord Jesus Christ put away the guilt of sin by his atoning sacrifice. He put away the punishment of it by his sufferings and death as our Substitute. The incarnate Son of God put away the penalty of the law by his satisfaction of Divine justice. He put away the consequences of sin by his obedience unto death. He puts away the dominion of sin in his people by the power of his grace in the new birth. He puts away the filth of sin by his sanctifying grace. And he shall put away the very being of sin in resurrection glory.

This work of putting away sin was accomplished by him bearing our sin in his own body upon the cursed tree. He carried
it and took it away. This is what was pictured in the Old Testament type of the scapegoat.

The Lord Jesus has removed sin from us as far as the east is from the west, by finishing and making an end of it. He disannulled and abolished it, insofar as the law and justice of God is concerned. When he paid our debt, he cancelled it in one day, by his one sacrifice. In one great day, the whole work was done (Zechariah 3:9). Our sins, being forever, effectually put away by the sacrifice of Christ, shall never be found and can never be charged to us again (Jeremiah 50:20; Romans 4:8).

My sin, (O the bliss of this glorious thought!)
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to his cross, and I bear it no more.
Praise the Lord! It is well with my soul!

Horatio Gates Spafford

How immeasurable and infinite the love of God in Christ is. I see in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ love to the uttermost, unquenched and unquenchable (John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:9, 10). Man pours floods upon this love to quench it, but it grows more intense. What patience with man’s utmost malice; what forbearance with his sin! “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Was ever love like this? So vast, so free, so overflowing. Sin abounding, grace did much more abound (John 13:1; Ephesians 3:14-19. O how he loves!

The purpose of our great God and Saviour is unalterably fixed, relentlessly pursued, and perfectly executed.

Our Saviour came here to do a work (Matthew 1:21), a work appointed to him and purposed by him from everlasting (Psalm 40; Hebrews 10); and he was determined to accomplish it, “straightened”, as he put it, until it was accomplished. It shall be accomplished. It shall be finished. He had come here to accomplish death; and it shall be accomplished (Luke 9:30, 31).
How will he do it? By what means shall the holy Lamb of God be sacrificed? The altar shall be built, built by man’s enmity. The sacrifice shall be slain, slain by man’s hatred. The work shall be done, done by man’s will. It shall be done exactly according to the purpose of God (Psalm 76:10; Acts 2:23).

How willing, how anxious the Lord Jesus Christ is to save poor, lost sinners!

The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is a vivid declaration that “where sin abounded grace did much more abound”! What is the meaning of the cross? Why was our Lord Jesus nailed to the cursed tree? Behold the dying thief and hear the answer. The Son of God came into the world to save sinners! Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost!

The Dying Thief

The dying thief is a true specimen of God’s elect. This man appears to have done nothing but evil all his life. We know nothing about him, except that he was a thief, a thief who had executed his crimes with violence, a thief who continued to blaspheme, even as he was being executed, a thief who was loved and chosen of God (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

Why was Immanuel’s blood poured out at Calvary? Christ Jesus poured out his life’s blood upon the cursed tree to wash away sin. Here I see it washing away the sins of one like myself, whose heart and life were as black as hell. Why did Christ suffer and die? It was to pardon the most guilty. It was not merely to save us from hell, but to open Paradise to the chief of sinners, to open it at once; not after years of torment, but “today”. Today “shalt thou be with me”. Yes, the Lord Jesus went back to heaven with this saved thief in his hands. What an efficacy there is in the cross! What grace! What glory! What cleansing! What justice! What blessedness!

By his death upon the cursed tree, the Son of God delivers and saves his people from their sins! Satisfying the justice of
God, he plucked us as brands from the burning, conquered hell, and defeated the devil and cast him down to hell. The first sinner saved by the cross, after it had been erected upon Calvary’s hill, was a wretched, justly condemned thief; and the Son of God went up to heaven with him to join in that joy that is in heaven over one sinner who repents.

See how near a person may be to hell and yet be saved! That thief was, as it were, upon the very brink of hell. He had one foot in the pit. Hell was in his heart. Hell had been his life. Soon, hell must be his portion forever! He had done nothing but evil continually all the days of his life. In the very last hour of his life, he is heard blaspheming and railing against the Lord Jesus. Yet, he was plucked from the fire by omnipotent mercy! Saved by the Son of God! He was just about to step into everlasting damnation, when the omnipotent hand of the Son of God seized him and lifted him up to Paradise!

Oh, what grace is here! What boundless love! What power to save! Who after this need despair? Truly our Lord Jesus Christ is mighty to save!

See how near you may be to Christ and yet be lost forever! The other thief was as near the Saviour as the one who was saved. Yet, he perished. He went to hell from the very side of the Son of God, from the very presence of Immanuel!

There are two men. Both are thieves. Both are damned. Both are lost. Both are without God, without Christ, without hope. Both are in the immediate presence of the crucified Christ. One is taken up to glory. One is taken up to heaven. The other is cast down to hell. What made the difference?

“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Throughout the Word of God we are constantly assured of these two facts. First, if anyone goes to hell, it is his own fault alone, his own responsibility, altogether the result of what he has done, and that for which he alone must bear the blame forever. Second, if
anyone is saved, if anyone goes to heaven, it is God’s work alone, altogether the result of that which God has done, and that for which God alone must have the praise forever.

“The wages of sin is death”! Sin is what we all are by nature; and sin is all that we do in a state of rebellion against God. It is as impossible for a sinner to do good as it is for water to be dry. Our corrupt nature corrupts all our thoughts, feelings, words, and deeds. As a corrupt fountain only brings forth corrupt water, so a corrupt heart only brings forth corruption. That means that the very ploughing of the wicked is an abomination to God, and even our righteousnesses are filthy rags in his sight (Proverbs 21:4; Isaiah 64:6). Sin is also our choice. We all drink iniquity like water (Job 15:16). And that which sin deserves is death, eternal death, which is eternal separation from God and the eternal vengeance of his holy wrath. Death is the debt God owes to sin. And God always pays his debts. The one thief went to hell because he ate the fruit of his own way.

**Eternal Life**

“But the gift of God is eternal life”! Eternal life comes to guilty sinners not as a debt, or a reward for something we have done, but as the free-grace gift of God. The new birth, which is the beginning of eternal life in the soul, is the gift of God. Faith in Christ is the gift of God. Heavenly glory, which is the consummation of eternal life, is also the gift of God. Death, hell, and judgment are things we earn by sin. But grace, life, and heaven are things freely given to sinners “through Jesus Christ our Lord”!

Christ, having paid the debt of sin for his people by his death upon the cross, has made it right and just for the holy Lord God, who must punish sin, to give eternal life to all for whom he died. Through the merits of Christ, through his blood and righteousness, God gives eternal life to everyone who believes on him. Even the faith by which we receive this gift is the gift of
God and the result of his operation of grace (Ephesians 2:8; Colossians 1:12). Faith in Christ is not the cause of God’s gift, but the result of it. If you now believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, God has given you eternal life. It is altogether his work. “Salvation is of the Lord”!

Can anyone be nearer to Christ than that thief was? Looking at him, hearing him, speaking to him, he was lost after all! Be warned. Outward nearness, religious duties, familiarity with the Word of God, baptism, eating and drinking the symbols of the Saviour’s body and blood, none of these things can save. You may be very near Christ, and yet not be in Christ. Salvation is not being near Christ. Salvation is being found in Christ.

Hear the taunts of the crowd, “He saved others; himself he cannot save” (Matthew 27:42; Mark 15:31). That is the very essence of the gospel. The Son of God died as our Substitute. In order to save us he had to sacrifice himself (Hebrews 10:9-14; 1 Peter 3:18; 1:18-21; 2:24). In the light of all these things, my heart cries, “God forbid 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.” Because he saved others, the Lord Jesus Christ could not save himself.
Chapter 52

“And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required … And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things” (Luke 23:24-49).

“Beholding These Things”

In this portion of holy scripture God the Holy Spirit describes the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ when he was hanged upon the cursed tree, bearing our sin in his own body and made sin for us. Let us take our place with all his acquaintances and the women who followed him from Galilee, “beholding these things”. We have before us an amazing, marvellous record. It is amazing and marvellous in our eyes when we remember who suffered these things. The great Sufferer before us is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the only truly holy and good man ever to live in this world. It is amazing and marvellous in our eyes when we remember for whom he suffered. The Son of God suffered the wrath of God for sinners who are by nature the enemies of God (Romans 5:6-8). And it is amazing and marvellous in our eyes when we remember why he suffered. The cause of his great sorrow and agony of body, soul, and spirit was the fact that the Son of God suffered for sin, as the sin-bearer. “Christ died for our sins”!
The Sorrow In Gethsemane
We have seen our Saviour’s sorrow in Gethsemane, when he prayed three times, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.” Such was the shock of his holy soul at the thought and prospect of being made sin that our holy Redeemer broke out into a sweat of blood. Luke describes it in these words. “Being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44).

The Scourging Of Gabbatha
We have seen the scourging of Gabbatha too. Our Lord was condemned in a mockery of justice at Pilate’s judgment hall, called Gabbatha (John 19:13). There he was delivered into the hands of cruel, barbaric Roman soldiers to be scourged. They took him into the common judgment hall, where they gathered an entire band of soldiers, between five and twelve hundred of them, to scourge our Saviour. They stripped him. They mercilessly whipped him with a Roman scourge. They mocked him. They beat him with their fists. They spat upon him!

“Then they led him away to crucify him”! We have before us Luke’s inspired narrative of the crucifixion at Mount Calvary. May God the Holy Spirit Who gave us this record now fill our hearts with reverence as we meditate upon it and seek to worship the Lamb of God Who was there sacrificed for our sins. The verses before us describe ...

The Slaughter At Golgotha
“And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left” (Luke 23:33).

Matthew wrote, “And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull.” “Golgotha” means “place of a skull”. Golgotha was just another name for
Calvary. Perhaps it was called Golgotha because in this place of slaughter, people who were stoned to death or crucified were simply covered over with a little dirt. Consequently, in a matter of time skulls and bones were everywhere.

**God’s Sovereignty**

In this scene of slaughter at Golgotha the Holy Spirit shows us a tremendous display of God’s glorious sovereignty in three things. First, we see here the fulfilment of scripture by men who had no regard for the scriptures. The soldiers who tormented our Lord had no more regard for the scriptures than hogs have for diamonds. Yet, they did exactly what God ordained they would do and said they would do (Acts 4:27, 28; 13:27-29). The Lord God made even those men who murdered his Son to be his witnesses.

The soldiers who mocked him, gave him vinegar to drink (Luke 23:36, 37; Matthew 27:34). Their mixture of vinegar (flat wine that had gone sour and bitter) mixed with gall was thought to be a mixture that would prolong one’s life. It was given by the soldiers because they must, according to God’s decree, fulfil the prophecy of Psalm 69:21. “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” John Gill wrote …

“This potion of vinegar with gall, was an aggravating circumstance in our Lord’s sufferings, being given to him when he had a violent thirst upon Him; and was an emblem of the bitter cup of God’s wrath, he had already tasted of in the garden, and was about to drink up”.

“When he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.” Our Lord refused to drink of the mixture because he was determined to suffer the wrath of God for us without any distraction or intoxication of mind. And he refused to drink of it because he would make all to know that he would do nothing to prolong his life, but was willing to die now that his hour, the fulness of time,
Matthew tells us that they parted his garments, casting lots for his vesture (Matthew 27:35). Again, we are reminded that the Lord God Almighty was in total control of all the affairs of this day of infamy. The barbaric soldiers did nothing except what God had long before said they would do. This parting of our Lord’s garments was a fulfilment of Psalm 22:18. “They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

Then, like the women and his acquaintances who followed him, Matthew tells us, “sitting down they watched him there” (Matthew 27:36). After they had scourged him, mocked him, beat him, and crucified him, those hardened men sat down to watch the Lamb of God die. Like little boys cruelly throw a worm into a fire just to watch it wriggle, squirm, and die, they watched the Son of God; but to their utter astonishment, there was no squirming, and no dying until he gave up the ghost by his own sovereign will.

Notice also that our Lord was crucified between two thieves, as the prophet Isaiah declared he must be (Isaiah 53:12; Luke 23:32; Matthew 27:38). As we have seen, these two thieves also give us a display of God’s sovereign, distinguishing grace in salvation. One of these thieves was plucked as a firebrand from the burning out of the very jaws of hell by God’s sovereign grace, while the other was left to suffer the just consequences of his sin. Let it never be forgotten by us that if we are saved, we are saved because God did it. The only distinction between God’s saints and the damned in hell is the distinction that grace has made (1 Corinthians 4:7; 15:10; Romans 9:16).

Here at Calvary we see a great display of God’s sovereignty in causing reprobate, unbelieving men to declare his truth, to declare the very essence of the gospel, though they never knew it themselves. We do not know because we are not told, but it may be that it was the testimony of spineless Pilate, the testimony of these wicked, taunting, jeering Jews, and the
testimony of the mocking chief priests, scribes and elders that became the instruments by which God taught that elect thief the gospel and brought him to faith in Christ. Hear now the testimony that he heard.

Pilate declared, “This is Jesus” (Matthew 27:37). “Jesus of Nazareth” (John 19:19). “The King of the Jews” (v. 38). This proclamation was made in Hebrew the language of religion, in Greek the language of philosophy, and in Latin the language of science. That was no accident. There is no true religion, no true philosophy, and no true science that does not begin with the acknowledgment and confession that Jesus Christ is King.

The priests, scribes, elders, and people, danced in a drunken, hellish party around Immanuel’s cross, and in their blasphemy spoke the truth of God as distinctly as inspired apostles. “Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days” (Matthew 27:40). Though they knew it not, those religious ritualists proclaimed the fact of our Lord’s death and resurrection. He destroyed the temple of his body in death. He raised it up again in three days.

Mockingly they cried, “He saved others; himself he cannot save” (Matthew 27:42; Luke 23:35). That is the very essence of the gospel. The Son of God died as our Substitute. Because he saved us he had to sacrifice himself.

Then, they jeered, “He trusted in God” (Matthew 27:43). Our Lord Jesus Christ, as a man, lived by faith, in all things trusting God his Father. Thus he taught us how to honour, obey, and live for God in this world by faith. But there is more. The Holy Spirit tells us repeatedly that we are saved and justified “by the faith of Jesus Christ.”

After that, they jeered again. “He said, I am the Son of God” (Matthew 27:43). Infidels choose to ignore it, but these people heard his doctrine plainly. Jesus Christ of Nazareth openly, publicly declared himself to be the Son of God. And that is who he is! He is God and man in one glorious Person. He was the
God-man in Mary’s womb, the God-man in his obedience for us, the God-man when he died upon the tree, and the God-man when he rose from the dead. Christ is the God-man exalted to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him.

And the hellish crowd declared, in Luke 23:35, that he who saved others, but could not save himself is “the Christ, the chosen of God” (Psalm 89:19; Isaiah 42:1; 43:10; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

**Scene Of Guilt**
But there is more, much more, that I see as I stand before my dying Saviour, “beholding these things”. Calvary is a scene of great guilt, guilt that deserved death. “There were also two other malefactors led with him to be put to death” (v. 32). The Lord Jesus was crucified between these two murderous malefactors, as if he were the greatest of the three. “He was numbered with the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12). He was “reckoned among the transgressors” (Luke 22:37). And in a very real sense, he was made the greatest of transgressors, for he who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. And when he was made sin, he was made a curse for us, and made to die under the wrath of God in our place. He did not merely bear the curse for us. He was made a curse for us (Galatians 3:13), because our guilt was made his guilt (Psalms 40:12; 69:5).

**Place Of Infinite Love**
Calvary is the place of indescribable, infinite love, eternal love, enduring love, self-denying love, saving love, everlasting love, divine love. Hear love welling up in the breaking heart of the Son of God, our crucified Substitute, as he prays, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (v. 34; John 13:1; 1 John 3:16; 4:9, 10; Romans 5:6-8; 2 Corinthians 8:9).
Grace And Salvation

“Beholding these things”, I have before my eye a scene of abounding grace in the salvation of sinners.

“And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death. And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots” (Luke 23:32-34).

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 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. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:39-43).

Upon the basis of his blood atonement, the Lord Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of the very people who mocked him and crucified Him; and he obtained it. That forgiveness he obtained is made manifest in the saving operations of his grace upon the dying thief. The Saviour said to him, “Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise”! Here we have a portrait of God’s sovereign saving grace that is full of instruction and of consolation.

The whole of salvation is summed up in the two words spoken by our Lord to the thief “with me”. He was with him in the covenant, with him in his obedience and with him in his death, and now he is with him in Paradise. “With me” is all the thief wanted. “With me” is heaven. “With me” is salvation.

None are beyond the reach of omnipotent mercy. The Lord Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by him. Our great God and Saviour is as willing to save as he is
able to save. His salvation is by grace alone, without works. This
dying thief was justified, sanctified, washed clean, and glorified
in one great, single stroke of mercy!

Learn this too. Those saints nearest death are nearest glory.
To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

**Judgment And Mercy**

“Beholding these things”, I see both great judgment and great
mercy.

“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness
over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened,
and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst” (Luke 23:44,
45).

The three hours of darkness over all the earth seems to me to
be a declaration of God’s great wrath and judgment against sin.
All who are without Christ are in great darkness; and darkness
shall be their portion forever if they die without our Saviour. But
the rent veil is a declaration of God’s infinite goodness and
mercy. The blood of Christ has opened the way for poor sinners
like us to come to God (Hebrews 10:19-22).

**Death Accomplished**

Once more, “beholding these things”, I see death accomplished.
“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father,
to thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he
gave up the ghost” (v.46). Our Saviour came here to die; and he
accomplished his mission. He was obedient unto death, even the
death of the cross. His accomplished death has brought life and
immortality to us, and gives us peace. Like those described in
verse 48, I smite my breast in repentance, “beholding these
things.” Blessed be his name, his death is the death of death for
this poor sinner! Believing on the Son of God, I shall never die.
“Death is swallowed up in victory. 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’!’
Chapter 53

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 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. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:39-43).

One Taken, The Other Left

He did not learn it until he was in hell; but in hell the rich man learned that between him and Lazarus “there is a great gulf fixed; so that they who would pass” from one side to the other cannot (Luke 16:26). So it has been, so it shall be, and so it is. The human race is divided into two parts: sheep and goats, elect and reprobate, Jacobs loved of God and Esaus hated by him, vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath. Goats will never become sheep; and sheep will never become goats. Elect will never become reprobate; and reprobate will never become elect. Jacob will never become Esau; and Esau will never become Jacob. Vessels of mercy will never become vessels of wrath; and vessels of wrath will never become vessels of mercy.

The gulf was fixed in eternity. The division was made in the decree of God. The distinction was established in eternity. It will
be made clear to all at Christ’s second coming, in that great day when the Son of God sits in judgment upon his Great White Throne (Luke 17:33-36). In that day, “one shall be taken, and the other left.” As it shall be in that day, so it is today. When the appointed time of love is come for the salvation of God’s chosen, one is taken, and the other left.

We have already seen this fact vividly set before us in the two thieves who were crucified with the Lord Jesus. Only Luke was inspired to tell us of our Saviour’s abundant mercy and distinguishing grace bestowed upon this dying thief. It is a story that deserves to be written in gold, told often, and remembered by all.

**Salvation By Grace**
The first thing that is obvious in this story is the fact that salvation is altogether the work of God’s free grace, altogether without works. This dying thief had no merit of any kind. He had no pre-disposition of heart toward the Son of God. He rendered no service to the Lord. He observed no ordinance. He was not baptized. He never united with, or even visited a church. He never observed the Lord’s Supper.

Everything we know about this man tells us that he was a depraved sinner, a moral degenerate, whose life of infamous shame was about to be ended by penal execution. Yet, this poor, wretched, degenerate man was saved. No explanation can be given for that fact except this: “By grace ye are saved” (Romans 9:16; Ephesians 2:1-5, 8, 9; Titus 3:3-7).

**Sovereign, Distinguishing Grace**
Second, God’s saving grace, in every instance of it, is set before us in holy scripture as sovereign, distinguishing grace. Certainly, that is obvious in the story of these two thieves. Both of the other malefactors crucified with the Lord Jesus were guilty thieves, justly condemned. Matthew and Mark tell us that both
joined in the rabble of Pharisees and the soldiers, mocking the Lord of Glory and railing upon him.

Then there was a sudden change. One of the thieves ceased to curse the Saviour and sued him for mercy, crying, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.” Both were equally near the Saviour, one on his right hand and the other on his left. Both saw and heard all that happened during the six hours that he hung on the cross. Both were dying men. Both were suffering acute, torturous pain. Both were alike wicked sinners. Both needed forgiveness. Yet, one died as he had lived, hardened in sin, proud and without repentance, unbelieving and without hope. The other repented, believed, cried to the Son of God for mercy, and was saved.

What made the difference? Grace! Grace alone! The penitent thief was made penitent because the Lord Jesus gave him life and faith by the power of his omnipotent grace. He snatched the dying thief from the very brink of hell and took him with him to heaven as a trophy of his rich, free and sovereign grace. His conversion cannot be accounted for in any other way. We can only say, “Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Matthew 11:26).

How can two people hear the same sermon, from the same preacher, in the same condition, and one be converted, while the other remains dead in sin? How can one be totally indifferent and the other bowed in brokenness before God? How can one pray for mercy, while the other blasphemes? How can one see and the other remain blind? There is only one answer that can be given to those questions. “The LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel” (Exodus 11:7; 1 Corinthians 4:7). In election, in redemption and in effectual calling it is God, and God alone, who makes the difference between men.

Timely Grace

Third, this dying thief shows us an example of the fact that grace
is always on time. Many say, concerning this man, “He was saved just in the nick of time.” But that is hardly the case. He was saved precisely at the divinely appointed time. He could not have been saved at any other time; and he could not have been saved at a better time.

He could not have been saved at any other time, because, for him, this was “the time of love”, when he must be called. As illustrated in Gomer, the Prodigal Son, Onesimus, and this dying thief, there is an appointed time for the salvation of each of God’s chosen (Galatians 4:4-6). Some are saved in youth. Some are saved in the middle of life. And some are saved in old age. But all who are saved are saved at the only time they could be saved, because for each of us it took the whole experience of our ruin to bring us to our Saviour.

And he could not have been saved at a better time. You might think, “But, wouldn’t it have been better for him to have lived longer, that he might serve and honour Christ upon the earth?” Let me answer that question by asking you what human being has ever been more useful. What man has ever been more influential for good? What person has been such a blessing to so many others? Who has ever been more instrumental for the glory of his maligned, blasphemed and ridiculed Redeemer than this man?

Every saved sinner is saved at God’s appointed time; and each one is saved at the best time.

The Means Of Grace
The fourth thing that strikes me about the conversion of this man is this: The means of grace is not always obvious. We know that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17). We know that sinners are “born-again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever … And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:23-25). But many point
to the dying thief and say, “That man was saved without hearing the gospel.” Was he? No.

Let me remind you of the things he heard, as he hung upon the cross. I do not know what he heard, or did not hear beforehand. But as he hung by his dying Saviour, he heard and saw the gospel as clearly as anyone ever could. He heard the Lord Jesus hailed as “the King of Israel” (Matthew 27:42). He heard that the Man hanging beside him had claimed to be the Son of God. “He said, I am the Son of God” (Matthew 27:43). He heard the chief priests and scribes say, “He saved others; himself he cannot save” (Mark 15:31). He heard the Lord Jesus himself pray, probably just as he and the other thief had railed upon him, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). How many times he heard people that day crying, “Save”! “Save”! “Save”! to the Saviour, as they derided him! He read Pilate’s testimony, “This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (Luke 23:38; John 19:19). And he saw the Lamb of God dying as a substitute in the place of a guilty man (Barabbas), who was released from death because he died in his place.

The Character Of Faith
Fifth, the dying thief shows us the character of true, saving faith. This man stands before us as a defining example of God-given faith (vv. 39-42).

“And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 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. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

Here are seven things that are always characteristics of that faith that comes to chosen, redeemed sinners by the gift and
operation of God the Holy Spirit.

True faith is the result of conviction and arises from Holy Spirit conviction. It acknowledges justice. Oh fall down and own that the sentence of the law, which curses you for sin, is just. Denounce the pride and self-righteousness of your heart.

True faith confesses sin. True faith confesses Christ’s holiness. “This man has done nothing amiss.” It confesses Christ as Lord and King. True faith looks to Christ alone for mercy. “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

True faith obtains God’s salvation. “And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise” (v. 43).

This man’s faith was, in all those respects, precisely the same as that which God gives to every heaven-born soul. Yet, his faith in Christ is the most remarkable display of faith to be seen in all the Word of God, the most remarkable faith to be found in the history of the world! He trusted Christ as God his Saviour, his Lord and King, when all others had forsaken him, as he was dying!

**A Willing Saviour**

Sixth, this inspired narrative declares in bold letters that the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to save all who come to God by him, and “able to save to the uttermost” (Hebrews 7:25). The Saviour is able to save any sinner in any circumstance, any place, any time. He is willing to save. But that is not all. The Son of God will save all who come to God by him (John 6:37-40).

**Glory Near**

Seventh, this brief history of the dying thief tells us how near we are to glory. Heavenly glory is but a breath away! What a consolation that fact ought to be to all God’s saints, especially when we find ourselves dying. Heaven is but a breath away. Our
Saviour said to this new-born soul, who would soon cease to live in his tortured body, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Without any past works to commend him, without possibility of future goodness, altogether by the work of Christ, he was assured of everlasting salvation with Christ in heaven!

“Today” speaks volumes. It tells us that as soon as this earthly house, this tabernacle of clay is dissolved, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 4:17-5:9). In that blessed state, in that place called heaven, we shall be with Christ! What is heaven like? Look yonder to the assembly around the throne. What are their joys, their feelings, their happiness? All is explained by this simple statement: They are with Christ.

If the sheep are with the Shepherd, if the members are with the Head, if the saints are with him who loved them and gave himself for them, if the Bride is with her Beloved, if the redeemed are with the Redeemer, if the saved are with the Saviour, all is well. Nothing is lacking. Their joy is full!

I do not know and cannot describe what heaven is; but the name of that city is Jehovah-Shammah, “the LORD is there” (Ezekiel 48:35). I want no more. I ask no more. I can have no more. “Christ is All”! Well did the Psalmist sing, “In Thy presence is fulness of joy” (Psalms 17:15; 27:4).

Jesus, Thou art the sinner’s Friend; as such I look to Thee. Now in the bowels of Thy love, O Lord, remember me. Remember Thy pure word of grace, Remember Calvary, Remember all Thy dying groans, and then remember me.

Thou wondrous Advocate with God, I yield myself to Thee; While Thou are sitting on the throne, Dear Lord, remember me.
I own I’m guilty, own I’m vile; yet Thy salvation’s free;  
Then in Thy all abounding grace, dear Lord, remember me.

However forsaken or distressed, however oppressed I be,  
However afflicted here on earth, do Thou remember me.  
And when I close my eyes in death, and creature helps all flee,  
Then, O my dear Redeemer God, I pray remember me.  
Richard Burnham

One Taken, The Other Left
When Joseph had interpreted the chief butler’s dream, how pathetically does he plead with him! “Think on me when it shall be well with thee” (Genesis 40:14). But such is the base ingratitude of man, that all was in vain. When the butler was restored, he cared nothing for Joseph in prison. Exalted men seldom care for needy souls. But it is not so with the King of kings. He is ever the Friend of poor sinners. He remembers us in our low estate. For us he hung on the accursed tree between two accursed sinners. One was taken, the other left.

In the saved thief we see the marvellous power of God’s sovereign grace. Here is a reviler changed into a suppliant. What caused the change? Let every proud notion of self-righteousness, self-worth and freewill forever perish! Fall down before the Son of God and adore his distinguishing grace. One malefactor was left to himself and went to hell blaspheming. The other died in faith, trusting Christ and praying. He was snatched, by omnipotent grace, from the jaws of hell, as a brand our Saviour would not allow to be burned. Do you see your nature to be as wicked and your state as desperate as this thief’s? If so, your soul is humbled before God. Do you see that nothing but the same grace of Christ can save you? If so, you will exalt the free
grace of God in Christ. Oh my soul, exalt the mercy, love and
grace of Christ!

Oh, may God the Holy Spirit teach you to pray as he taught
this man to pray, “Lord, Remember me. There is no Saviour but
you, no salvation but by you. I am a hopeless, helpless sinner;
unless you save me, I must be damned forever. You are the
King. Yours is the kingdom. Oh bring me with you into your
kingdom”! If God will grant you such faith in the Saviour,
Christ Jesus, you will soon be in Glory with the same Lord, who
“is rich” in mercy “unto all who call on him” (Romans 10:12).

Oh, what a great magnet the crucified Christ is to poor,
needy, helpless sinners! “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will
draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he
should die” (John 12:32, 33). Let every member of Immanuel’s
Bride cry as we are taught of God, “Draw me, we will run after
thee” (Song of Solomon 1:4).
“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst” (Luke 23:44, 45).

The Rent Veil

In these two verses before us we have Luke’s very brief account of our Saviour’s last three hours of agony upon the cursed tree, the last three hours of torture he endured for us as our Substitute, because he was made sin for us. Let us ever read these inspired narratives with reverence, with hearts broken over sin, and yet rejoicing at the forgiveness of sin obtained at such a price. May God the Holy Spirit sanctify our hearts and minds as we once more attempt to meditate upon our Lord’s sufferings, and seek to know and worship him who suffered all the hell of God’s holy wrath for us.

The Darkness
The Spirit of God here tells us that there was darkness over all the earth for three hours. This was not a natural solar eclipse, but a supernatural one, an eclipse specifically performed by God on this occasion. It was the eclipse that the prophet Amos prophesied. “It shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day” (Amos 8:9).

The darkness lasted for three hours. Men in other parts of the
world, who had no idea what was going on in Jerusalem, spoke of it. A man named Dionysius, living in Egypt at the time, said, “Either the Divine Being suffers, or suffers with him that suffers, or the frame of the world is dissolving.” Apparently, this eclipse was a complete eclipse of the sun engulfing the entire world with darkness at one time! For three hours, from high noon until three o’clock, the sun refused to shine. Thus the Lord God gives a vivid, symbolic display of four things.

1. The heinousness of the crime being committed: though our Saviour died and was slaughtered by the hands of wicked men exactly according to the purpose, will, and decree of God Almighty for the salvation of his elect, God’s decree did not in any way excuse their sin in crucifying him (Acts 2:22, 23).

2. The blackness, darkness, and blindness of men’s hearts by nature: no impression was made upon these men, though God performed miracles unheard of, before or since, all around them. The fact is, man’s heart by nature is so blind that no acts of providence, either in goodness or in judgment, can be seen by him, unless God takes the scales off his eyes.

3. The emptiness and darkness of Christless religion: Judaism had become mere ritualism. As such, it was altogether darkness. Religion without Christ, without life, without faith is darkness, no matter how orthodox it appears!

4. The darkness that passed upon and engulfed our Saviour’s holy soul when he was made sin for us: Matthew tells us, at “about the ninth hour”, about three o’clock in the afternoon, which was about the time of the slaying and offering of the evening sacrifice, which was an eminent type of Christ, “Jesus cried with a loud voice”. He cried out as one in great distress, having been silent during the three hours darkness, patiently bearing all his soul’s sufferings, under a sense of divine wrath, the hiding of his Father’s face, and his conflicts with the powers of darkness; but now, in the anguish of his soul, he breaks out with a cry that pierces the darkness, “saying, Eli, Eli, lama
sabachthani? that is to say, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Here our Saviour speaks as a man, the man chosen, made, ordained, and anointed by God with the oil of gladness above his fellows. As a man, our Lord was upheld and strengthened by the Father, just as we are. As a man, he trusted God, loved him, and prayed to him, just as we do; only he did so perfectly, without sin. Though now the Father hid his face from him, still he expresses strong faith in him and love for him.

When he is said to be, “forsaken” of God, the meaning is not that he was separated from the love of God or did not know the reason for his abandonment. Our Surety now stood in our place bearing our sins. He, therefore, had to endure abandonment by God the Father to satisfy justice.

This cry, “My God, my God, Why hast thou forsaken me?” expresses the very soul of his sufferings as our Substitute. Indeed, all the wailing and howling of the damned in hell to all eternity will fall infinitely short of expressing the evil and bitterness of sin. But here we see how vile a thing sin is. When God found our sin upon his darling Son, he forsook him in wrath! Whenever we read these words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” , we ought to immediately realize that we have been ransomed by an indescribably great price, that the Lord our God is infinitely holy and just, that he must and will punish all sin, and that the Lord God Almighty loves his people with an infinite, indescribable, everlasting love! And we should be convinced by our Saviour’s cry, from his deep agony of soul, that God’s elect shall never be forsaken, neither in this world nor in the world to come!

The Veil Rent
After that, the Lord Jesus cried again, with a loud voice, and “yielded up the ghost.” Our Lord’s strength was not abated. His last word was not the gasping breath of a failing life, but the
triumphant shout of a conquering King. The Son of God voluntarily laid down his life for his sheep. He did not lose his spirit; he dismissed it. His work was finished. His mission was complete. Therefore, he laid down his life for his people, voluntarily, as our Surety, suffering vicariously as our Substitute. And he did so triumphantly, conquering sin, death, Satan, and hell for us.

Then, we read, “and the veil in the temple was rent.” Matthew is more detailed and more graphic in his account. He wrote, “And, behold, the veil in the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matthew 27:51). The typical, symbolic veil was rent. And, at the same instant, the true veil was rent. What is the meaning of this rent veil? Why was it rent?

Try to picture what was happening in Jerusalem. Just a short distance from Mount Calvary stood Mount Moriah and the Jews’ temple. It is at the hour of the evening sacrifice. The sun has been darkened by the hand of God for three hours. Thousands were gathered in Jerusalem for the passover. Many were still at Calvary. Others had made their way to the temple. The priest in all his gorgeous robes is going through the now empty rituals of the Jews’ Passover. As he meanders around in the holy place, suddenly, the veil of the temple, separating the holy place from the most holy place, was ripped apart before his eyes, ripped from top to bottom, as if God himself had taken it in his hands and ripped it.

Can you imagine the shock of that pretentious priest? Can you imagine the shock of the people as they looked within the holy of holies? It was, except for the priest, utterly empty! The ark of the covenant was not there. The mercy-seat was not there. Though the temple was rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity, the ark of the covenant and the mercy-seat were never recovered and never brought into Solomon’s temple. J. C. Philpot points out:

“There were five things in Solomon’s temple destroyed by
Nebuchadnezzar, which were not in the second temple, which was erected after the Babylonish captivity. Five memorials or tokens of God’s special presence were there wanting. One was the ark of the covenant; another, the fire from heaven upon the bronze altar; the third, the Shechinah, or cloud that rested upon the mercy-seat; the fourth, the Urim and Thummin which were in the breast-plate of the high-priest; and the fifth, the spirit of prophecy. For though there were the prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, at the time of, and shortly after, the restoration; yet the spirit of prophecy ceased with Malachi, and did not reappear until John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord Jesus.”

For centuries, the Jewish priests faked keeping the passover! We can only imagine the criminally selfish motives behind their actions. But now their empty, sham religion was exposed to all.

Suddenly, as though the sky opened, we are lifted up and carried from the earth into heaven, from the carnal into the spiritual, from mortality into immortality, of which it is written by John when he was in the Spirit, “I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.” In that Temple all is full!

We have no need of a physical temple, for we are the temple of God. Seated now in the holy place with Christ, we understand and see clearly that Christ is all. Everything in the carnal, earthly, material temple spoke of him. Christ is our Priest and our Altar. He is the Lamb of God, our sacrificed Passover, and our Mercy-seat. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Shekinah-glory, the brightness of the glory of the triune God. Let us now turn aside, as Moses did at the bush, and see this great sight. What does it mean?

The Veil
The veil was rent, not consumed by fire. Had it been consumed with fire, we might miss the meaning of the picture. Our Lord
by his death did not destroy the way of access to God. He opened it. Now, we go through the rent veil by his blood into the holiest. The new and living way, by which we come to God, is paved with gold and sprinkled with blood.

The veil was rent while the temple was still standing in Jerusalem. Had the earthquake, that rent the rocks and opened graves, struck down the temple or shattered its walls, men might have said that it was the earthquake that rent the veil. But now it is made clear to all that no natural convulsion of the earth threw the veil open, making the holy of holies as accessible as the outer court, which all might enter, and where all might worship.

The veil was rent in twain. It did not fall to pieces, and was not torn to shreds. The rent was clean and straight, made by the invisible hand of the invisible God. Perhaps this exact division into two parts symbolized the separation of Christ’s soul from his body in death. Perhaps it symbolized the throwing open of the great door between earth and heaven, as John saw in his vision, indicating the complete reconciliation of fellowship between God and his people by the blood of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Revelation 4:1, 2).

The veil was rent from the top to the bottom. It was not rent from side to side, or from the bottom to the top, which might have suggested that it was simply worn out from usage. It was rent from the top to the bottom, showing that the power which rent it was from above, not from beneath. The rending of the veil was not of man, but of God. It was man that crucified the Lord of Glory, but “it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.” Beginning with the roof and ending with the floor, the rent was complete; for God in heaven had done it. From the roof to floor, there remained not one fragment of the old veil. So from heaven to earth, from the throne of God, down to the dwelling of man, there is not one remnant, not one particle of a barrier between redeemed sinners and the God of Glory. He who “openeth and no man shutteth” has, with his own hand, and in
his own boundless mercy, love, and grace, thrown open to the chief of sinners the throne of grace, and bids us come in and draw near (Hebrews 4:16).

The rent veil declares that Christ is the end of the law. He finished and fulfilled it. He satisfied and completed it. Now, we have free and open access to the throne of God. The rending of the veil was done, as if the temple itself mourned for and testified abhorrence at the crucifixion of Christ. The temple rent, as it were, its garments at the death of its Lord. The veil was rent to show that the Lord, who had taken up his residence in the most holy place between the cherubim, over the mercy-seat in thick darkness, had now moved out and left the house desolate. The rending of the veil signified the rending of Christ’s flesh, the breaking of his body for us, which was typified by the veil (Hebrews 10:20). The veil was rent to signify the clear, full revelation of God and his saving grace proclaimed in the gospel, proclaiming the way into the holiest of all, into heaven itself, where Christ is, who entered by his own blood, as our Forerunner (Hebrews 10:9-22).

The veil was rent in the presence of the Jewish priests. They were in the holy place, outside the veil, of course, officiating, lighting the lamps, or placing incense on the golden altar, or arranging the shewbread on the golden table. When they saw the solemn rending of the veil, they must have been terrified. I can picture them covering their eyes lest they should see the hidden glories of that holy chamber they were forbidden to enter. Perhaps Isaiah’s words rang in their ears, “Woe is me, for I am undone; I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).

The veil was rent before their eyes to declare that Christ, our Passover, the true Passover, has opened the way for man to come to God. It is as though the Lord God himself declared, “It is okay for you to come in. It is no longer profanity for you to
handle the holy things of the sanctuary, to gaze upon the sacrificial blood, approach the Mercy-Seat and sit down in the presence of the glory of God.” Truly, the safest and the most blessed place for our needy souls is the Mercy-seat, Christ Jesus. He bids us come into the holy place and handle him (1 John 1:1-2).

The veil was rent at the time of the evening sacrifice. About three o’clock in the afternoon, as the sun began to set, the lamb was slain and laid upon the brazen altar. Just at the moment when its blood was shed, and the smoke arose from the fire that was consuming it, the veil was rent in twain. There was an unseen link between the altar and the veil, between the sacrifice and the rending, between the blood-shedding and the removal of the barrier. It was blood that had done the work. It was blood that had rent the veil and thrown open the door of access to God, the blood of “the Lamb, without blemish, and without spot.”

The veil was rent precisely at the moment when the Son of God died on the cross. His death did it! His death opened God’s heaven for our souls. His death opened for us the way of life and brought us into life. It was from the cross that the power emanated which rent the veil. From that place of weakness and shame and agony came forth the omnipotent command, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors.” Our Saviour’s triumphant cry, “It is finished”, upon Golgotha, was the appointed signal; and the instantaneous response was the rending of the veil. The pierced hands of our accepted Sacrifice rent the veil separating God and man. It was the cross of Christ that rent the veil and opened the new and living way into the holiest of all.

When the veil was rent, the cherubim embroidered on it were rent with it. Those cherubim symbolized the Church of God’s elect. Being embroidered into the veil, we see a picture of our identification with Christ in his death. We were nailed with him to the cross. We were crucified with him. With him, we
died, and were buried, and rose again. In that rent veil we have the temple-symbol of the apostle’s doctrine concerning our union and oneness with Christ in life and death. “I am crucified with Christ.” “Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.”

The rent veil declares that all the law is fulfilled, satisfied, and ended. “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.” “There is therefore, now, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.”

The broken body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus opened the sinner’s way into the holiest. These were the tokens of grace and of righteousness. The rending of the veil was not merely an act of God’s power. And it was not merely an act of his grace. Righteousness had done it. Righteousness had rolled away the stone. Righteousness had burst the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron. The barrier of separation has been righteously removed. We have a righteous as well as a gracious entrance into the holy place. God gives sinners a righteous as well as a gracious welcome at his throne!

That which the blood of bulls and goats could never do, Christ has done with his own precious blood! Thank God forever; his is better blood! It knocks but once, and the gate flies open. As soon as the blood touches the sword of fire, it is quenched. Not a moment is lost. The fulness of the time has come. God has unbarred the door! He has thrown open his mercy-seat to poor, needy sinners, and rushes to receive his banished ones!

The veil, then, has been rent in twain from the top to the bottom by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. The way is open. The blood is sprinkled. The mercy-seat is accessible. And the voice of our Great High Priest, seated on that mercy-seat, bids us enter in, and to enter in boldly, without fear. “Having, therefore, 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 the full assurance of faith.”

Let us therefore enter in and find the mercy and grace we need in him. Entering in is our only security and our only joy. The only way we can enter in by Christ the Way is in the confident boldness of “the full assurance of faith”, trusting him alone as our all-sufficient, gloriously effectual Saviour. Not to come with such boldness is unbelief. Not to come in the full assurance of faith is presumption. To draw near with an “evil conscience” is to declare our belief that the blood of the Lamb is not of itself enough to give the sinner a good conscience and a fearless access to the throne of grace.

Do you ask, “May I draw near, just as I am, by the blood of Christ?” Yes, you may! How else could you come? If ever you see the blood upon the mercy-seat, that will give you the boldness and full assurance of faith by which you may enter in. Do you see it? Has God the Holy Spirit given you eyes to see? Then come boldly in the full assurance of faith. The Triune God looks on the blood, and says, “Welcome”. The mercy-seat is the place of pardon. No sinner who enters into the holy place, no sinner who comes to the throne of grace by the precious blood of Christ can ever be extracted from it.

The rent veil is liberty of access. The sprinkled blood is boldness, boldness for needy sinners. The rent veil has a voice. The blood is the voice. It speaks pardon, peace, salvation, and eternal life to sinners. “Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart”! Make haste and enter in!
Chapter 55

“And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. 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. Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man. And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned. And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things” (Luke 23:44-49).

Our Saviour’s Death

What great wonders attended the death of God’s darling Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, upon the cursed tree!

Two Great Miracles
In the passage before us we are told that two great miracles attended the sacrifice of our Saviour at Calvary. First, God the Holy Spirit here calls our attention to the fact that there was “a darkness over all the earth” for three hours. “The sun was darkened and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.” Our Saviour, the true Passover, is here delivering his true Israel out of great darkness. Therefore, as the sun was darkened in Egypt for three days, it was darkened for three hours when the Lamb of
God was sacrificed for us.

Nothing could be more proper and fitting. When the great sacrifice for sin was offered, when the Son of God was dying, darkness covered the earth. This was done by the hand of God once before in the sight of all Israel. When the Lord God came to redeem Israel out of Egypt, he sent darkness upon that cursed land for three days. And when the law by which we are condemned was given on Mount Sinai, God sent darkness upon the mountain of terror. Now, as the One who gave the law suffers all the penalty of the law for us, being made a curse for us, on Mount Calvary the sun was darkened for three hours. Such a miracle, complete darkness at mid-day, was a miracle that should arrest our attention. It should compel us to stop and think.

During those three hours of darkness, our Redeemer was assaulted by all the powers of darkness with utmost might and malice. But he foiled them all and spoiled them all. He made an open show of them (as Roman conquerors used to do), triumphing over them on his cross, as on his chariot of state (Colossians 2:13-17), dragging his vanquished enemies and ours bound behind him (Ephesians 4:8; Psalm 68:17-20).

Next, we read that “the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.” That huge, thick curtain that hung between the holy place and the holy of holies was ripped from top to bottom. This was a miracle that must have shook the priests in the temple in their very souls. What an instructive miracle it is!

The law that once separated man and God has been completely fulfilled, satisfied, and terminated by the death of our Substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 6:14, 15; 7:4; 8:1-4; 10:4; Galatians 3:13, 24-26; 5:1)

Christ is the fulfilment of the law. Christ is the satisfaction of the law. Christ is the end, the finish, the termination of the law. We have no covenant with the law. We live under a covenant of grace. We have no commitment to the law. Our
commitment is to Christ, who obeyed the law for us. We do nothing by constraint of the law. “The love of Christ constraineth us.” We fear no curse from the law. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. For it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.”

By the rending of that veil, God and men are reconciled; and by the rending of that veil, everything that separates men from one another is destroyed (Ephesians 2:11-22). Sinners like you and me have free access to God in all his glorious holiness (Romans 4:25-5:11; Hebrews 10:19-22).

Signs like these are part of the ways God speaks to arouse man’s attention and warn. He often performs miraculous things, forcing eternity bound sinners to open their eyes whether they want to or not, and to hear his voice though they try to be deaf to it. He has done so many times in the days that are past: when he brought Israel out of Egypt, when he gave the law at Sinai. And he did so when by the sacrifice of his Son, he brought in this great day of grace. He will do so again when Christ comes in his glory (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 1:7). He says, “Yet once more, I will shake not the earth only, but also the heavens” (Hebrews 12:26; Isaiah 24:23).

The Saviour’s Cry
In verse 46 we hear our Saviour’s cry to his Father and our Father, as he left this world, having finished everything he came into the world to accomplish. “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.”

There was something mysterious about our Lord’s death, which made it unlike the death of any mere man. He who spoke those words is both God and man. His divine and human natures are inseparably united. Our Saviour did not die as we shall. He did not die because he was compelled to die, or could not avoid dying. No! He voluntarily laid down his life as our Good
Shepherd (John 10:15-18). He died as our sin-atoning Substitute. And he set before us in his death the example we ought to follow in life, committing himself entirely to God (1 Peter 2:19-25; Philippians 3:7-10).

The Centurion
“Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man” (v. 47). I do not doubt at all that this centurion was converted by his dying Redeemer. His testimony in Matthew and Mark goes further: “Truly this was the Son of God.” He glorified God. He confessed that Christ was the Righteous Man. And he worshipped him as the Son of God.

“And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned” (v. 48). They were terrified by their crime. They were repentant, pricked in their consciences; but theirs was “a repentance to be repented of”. They returned to their homes under the wrath of God.

“And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things” (v. 49). They stood afar off from danger, because their Surety had died. They stood, “beholding these things”, with wonder, as well as looking upon their dear suffering Lord, with aching hearts and flowing eyes, remembering all he had taught, reflecting upon what they were beholding that day: redemption accomplished!

Sons of peace redeemed by blood,
Raise your songs to Zion’s God;
Made from condemnation free,
Grace triumphant sing with me.
Calvary’s wonders let us trace,
Justice magnified in grace;
Mark the purple streams, and say,
Thus my sins were washed away.

Wrath Divine no more we dread,
Vengeance smote our Surety’s head;
Legal claims are fully met,
Jesus paid the dreadful debt.
Sin is lost beneath the flood,
Drowned in the Redeemer’s blood,
Zion, oh! How blest art thou,
Justified from all things now.

John Kent
“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. 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. 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” (Luke 23:50-56).

Joseph Of Arimathaea

Some flowers only bloom at night. Joseph of Arimathaea was just such a flower. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all tell us the story of this man. Yet, there is no mention of him anywhere in the Word of God, until late in the evening of our Lord’s crucifixion; and there is no mention of him afterward. In so far as the record of holy scripture is concerned, he seems to have stepped onto the stage of history just after our Saviour died, did just one thing, and then stepped off the stage into oblivion.

This rich man of Arimathaea was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, that mob of self-righteous Pharisees, that horrible Jewish religious court that had the Lord Jesus crucified. Yet, the
Holy Spirit expressly tells us that he was “a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38). Because he was a member of the Sanhedrin, because his fear of the Jews kept him from openly confessing the Lord Jesus, Joseph of Arimathaea is often overlooked, or looked upon with disdain.

We all naturally imagine that we would not have feared those men Joseph feared, that we would not keep our faith in Christ a secret thing, and that we would not remain a part of any church or religious body that had condemned the Lord Jesus and cried for his crucifixion. In fact, our proud, self-righteous hearts would quickly cast this man aside as a reprobate hypocrite, except for one thing. God the Holy Spirit tells us (vv. 50, 51) that Joseph of Arimathaea “was a good man, and a just … who also himself waited for the kingdom of God.” The word translated “good” in this particular place means “ready”. The word “just” means “righteous, right, innocent, or faultless”.

That sure messes things up. Doesn’t it? It messes things up only if we are so foolish that we imagine that we know the heart of another and insist upon sitting ourselves up as judges before whom all the world must stand or fall!

No one around him, believers or unbelievers, church folk or street folk, no one around him imagined that Joseph was one of the Lord’s disciples. “If he had”, as proud religious men say, “been put on trial for being a Christian, there would not have been enough evidence to convict him.” But Joseph of Arimathaea was the right man in the right place at the right time. He was one of God’s saints, a man chosen for a specific service, brought forth to the light at exactly the right time. I do not excuse his fear of the Jews. I do not excuse his refusal to identify himself with his Lord. I do not justify his membership in the Sanhedrin. And I do not imagine that you would have done any better or any different than he did had you been in his place. I am certain I would not have behaved better.

Having said all that, somehow, when he saw his Saviour,
whom he dearly loved, whom he trusted, the King for whom he had been looking, crucified upon the cursed tree, extraordinary courage nerved his spirit, and boldly he went to Pilate and begged the body of his Lord, that he might give him a proper burial. When others were cowardly, Joseph was courageous. When others showed themselves lax, Joseph was loyal. When others denied their Saviour, Joseph stepped forward to identify himself with his Redeemer and Lord. When others were reluctant, Joseph was ready.

Multitudes, like Joseph, have been emboldened by the cross of Christ to do what they would never have thought of doing otherwise. When night comes, the stars appear; and in the darkest night in the history of the world this star shined brightly.

Seven Lessons
Our great God rules and overrules all things for his own glory and the good of his elect. How could Isaiah’s prophecy have been fulfilled, that Christ would make his grave with the rich in his death (Isaiah 53:9), except as it actually came to pass? He who was numbered with the transgressors and bare the sin of many made his grave with the rich.

When the Jewish leaders went to Pilate to have the Lord’s legs broken and the body taken from the cross, they did not say, “We need to bury the body”, and did not ask that his body might be buried. The bodies of the crucified men were thrown into a common pit to be meat for buzzards and wild animals. The bodies were left in the open to rot, until the sun had bleached their bones. There was no thought of burying the crucified felon. Even if the disciples had gotten up the nerve to have their Lord buried, they had no grave in Jerusalem. They were Galileans. They could not carry the Saviour’s body back to Galilee.

Red Heifer
But, back in Numbers 19 there was a law given in Israel, one of
the ceremonies required by God that the Jews never kept. It involved the sacrifice of a red heifer. This red heifer offering was one of the most beautiful, intimate and intricate types of the offering of the Son of God for sinners given in the Old Testament; but it was never observed by anyone. This is what God required in Numbers 19.

“And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke: And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face: And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times: And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn: And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer. Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even. And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even. And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin. And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever” (Numbers 19:1-10).

“And a man that is clean shall gather.” A ceremonially clean man, one who has kept the ceremonial law of Moses, one who had no taint of ceremonial defilement on him, he “shall gather
up the ashes of the heifer.” All that was left after the sacrifice was to be gathered by a clean man. He was to “lay them up without the camp in a clean place.”

What was an unclean place? An unclean place under the law was anywhere a dead body had been. So it was essential that Christ be buried outside the camp. It was essential that he be buried in a clean place. Where could such a burying place be found? God supplied this rich man from Arimathaea, Joseph, who had a sepulchre nearby, “that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid” (Luke 23:53).

If the Lord Jesus had been buried in a sepulchre where some other dead body had been laid, the ceremonial law would have been violated; but there was a tomb already prepared by God’s providence, where never man was laid. Joseph of Arimathaea had cut out the tomb for himself. It was to be his own grave. He had no idea, when he cut through the stone that prepared that burial place, that he was fulfilling the words of Isaiah chapter 53. “He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death.” But that is exactly what he did.

There is more. The law required a clean man must do the job. You could not have found a cleaner man in all Jerusalem, as far as the ceremonial law of God was concerned, than Joseph of Arimathaea. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, one who rigidly observed the ceremonies of the law.

Still, one thing stood in the way. Joseph was a terribly timid man. He was a secret disciple. But something happened. A miracle was wrought in his heart, and Joseph suddenly became a very bold man. He went in boldly and craved the body of the Lord Jesus.

Still, there is a problem. Once a clean man touched a dead body he was unclean. That meant he could not keep the Passover. But that problem vanished in an instant. Joseph now understood that he did not need to keep the ceremonial Passover, because Christ his Passover had been sacrificed for him. The
dead body he was handling was not his defilement, but his cleanness. The Lord Jesus had, by his shed blood, made atonement for his defilement (sin). The crucified Saviour had made him clean; and he could not be made unclean again (Romans 4:8).

The bodies of God’s saints ought to be treated with honour and buried. As our Saviour was buried as our Surety, brought to the dust of death (Psalm 22:15), that he might conquer death in his resurrection, we bury our brothers and sisters in Christ in hope and expectation of the resurrection. As our Lord Jesus was wrapped for his burial in a linen garment like a priest, we who are his shall be buried in the white linen, priestly garments of his righteousness, as a holy priesthood (Revelation 19:6-9).

Death is not something God’s people have any reason to fear. C. H. Spurgeon wrote, “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.”

None of us has ability to look upon the heart of another. The fact we do not see grace in a person does not mean that grace is not there. “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations” (Romans 14:1).

Salvation is altogether by the grace of God. Our only righteousness is the righteousness he gives us in and by Christ. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us for justification. And the righteousness of Christ is imparted to us in regeneration, by the irresistible power and effectual grace of God the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 3:10-12; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; 1 John 3:7-9). Just as the fallen, unrighteous nature of Adam was imparted to all men by natural birth, the holy, righteous nature of Christ is imparted to all God’s elect in the new birth.

I am not saying that the believer is without sin. He is not. Sin is what we are by nature. Sin is mixed with all we do. Sin mars
our best thoughts, blackens our best deeds, corrupts our best words, and defiles our best aspirations. I am not saying that the old nature is changed in regeneration. It is not. Flesh is always flesh. It never improves. It never becomes spirit. It only corrupts, rots, and, thank God, in time dies. I am not saying that the believer’s works can ever be accepted before God upon their own merit. They are not. We offer up our prayers and sacrifices to God, which are accepted by him only upon the merits of Christ’s righteousness and blood atonement (1 Peter 2:5).

But I am saying that the person who is born of God is a new creature in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). He has a new nature, which is “Christ in you the hope of glory.” All who are born of God have in them that “new man created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Those who do not have this imparted righteousness are no more born of God than those who do not have Christ’s imputed righteousness are justified before God.

God knows the best time to bring forth his servants to do the work for which he has ordained them, and the best means to secure it. When Joseph was needed, the Lord God had him ready for the service he was to perform.

The sabbath was a day of rest in the Old Testament. Christ our Sabbath is our rest. We keep the sabbath by faith, ceasing from our own works and resting in our Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 4:9).
Chapter 57

“The Tomb Was Not Empty

We often speak of “the empty tomb” as proof of our Saviour’s resurrection from the dead, but that really is not accurate. The
tomb really wasn’t empty. We who believe in the risen Christ have entered into his rest, because he is resting at the right hand of the Father. We rest in Christ, the risen Redeemer, because his work is finished. His resurrection is the pledge that he has perfected forever them that are sanctified. He has finished all the salvation of his people, and we are complete in him. It is my hope that God the Holy Spirit will enable me to set before you some restful thoughts, as we make a pilgrimage to the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea, and see the place where the Lord lay.

Once Died
The very first thing that must be remembered is this. Christ Jesus once died. “For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God” (Romans 6:10). So, as we gather around the place where the Lord Jesus slept “with the rich in his death”, seeing the stone rolled from the mouth of the tomb, we know he is not there. Yet, he assuredly was once there. “He was crucified, dead, and buried.” He was as dead as the dead whose bodies are buried in the cemetery. Though he could see no corruption, though he could not be held by the bands of death beyond the predestined time, yet he was once dead. There was a time when there was no light in his eye, no sound in his ear, no thought in his mind, and no word in his mouth, because there was no pulse of life in his heart.

Christ died for our sins. He did not merely appear to be dead. He died unto sin once, because he was made sin for us. He was, therefore, buried in the sepulchre. A dead man is a fit occupant of the silent tomb. But, blessed be his name, he is not there now! He is risen from the dead. We look to the risen Christ as our only Saviour and our only salvation, receiving the atonement from him (Romans 4:25-5:11).

We rejoice to know that “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” And when he rose
again the third day, our blessed Saviour left some things in his
tomb for us. What things did he leave? How are they to be used
by us?

**Sweet Spices**

First, the Lord Jesus left sweet spices in the tomb. When he
arose, he did not take those costly spices in which his body was
wrapped with him. He left them behind. Joseph had brought
about one hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes, and the sweet
aroma of those spices remained in the tomb. That tomb must
have smelled like a perfume store, when Peter and John stepped
into it.

What a blessed thought that is, when taken in a spiritual
sense! Our Lord Jesus has filled the grave with a sweet
fragrance. It no longer smells of corruption and foul decay. We
can sing with Isaac Watts:

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Why do we mourn departing friends,
Or shake at death’s alarms?
’Tis but the voice that Jesus sends
To call them to His arms.

Are we not tending upward, too,
As fast as time can move?
Nor would we wish the hours more slow
To keep us from our love.

Why should we tremble to convey
Their bodies to the tomb?
There the dear flesh of Jesus lay,
And left a long perfume.

The graves of all His saints He blessed,
And softened every bed;
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Where should the dying members rest,
But with the dying Head?

Thence He arose, ascending high,
And showed our feet the way;
Up to the Lord our flesh shall fly,
At the great rising day.

Then let the last loud trumpet sound,
And bid our kindred rise;
Awake, ye nations under ground;
Ye saints, ascend the skies.

That bed awaiting our bodies beneath the earth is now perfumed with costly spices and decked with sweet flowers. There the truest Friend we have once laid his holy head. The angel’s first word to the women who came to the tomb was, “Fear not ye” (Matthew 28:5). We should never draw back with fear from the grave. Our Lord was once there; and where he goes, no terror can remain. Let us, therefore, say with David, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

Grave Clothes
Next, our Saviour left his grave clothes behind him in the tomb. When Peter went into the sepulchre, he saw the grave clothes carefully folded by themselves, laying to one side. He did not leave behind him a mouldy shroud, but, as Luke tells us in verse 12, “linen clothes”.

He left those grave clothes for us to look upon as tokens of his fellowship with us in our low estate, as reminders that as he has cast aside the garments of death so shall we. When he arose from his chamber, he left his bedclothes behind. And when we
drop these bodies in death, as we ascend up to heaven, we will leave these garments of death behind (2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1-9; Psalms 27:13; 17:15; Isaiah 57:1, 2). “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.”

Look at it another way. When visiting battlefields and museums of war, we see flags hung up in such places as the memorials of victory, memorials of defeated enemies and battles won. So it is in the tomb where the Saviour vanquished death. There his grave clothes were laid as the trophies of his victory over death, and assurances to us that we have been made more than conquerors through him that hath loved us. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

Take one more look at those linen grave clothes in the fragrant tomb. Do they not lay before your eye of faith as emblems of his righteousness, that righteousness by which he merits heavenly glory as our Surety, that righteousness he has made ours, by which we are made “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light”? (See Psalm 132:7-9, Revelation 14:4, 5 and 19:6-9).

**The Napkin**

Then, John adds, Peter saw “the napkin that was about his head” carefully folded up and laid by itself (John 20:6, 7). I see that napkin in our Saviour’s tomb still. It is the handkerchief with which the Lord God wipes every tear from our eyes. Let the widow and the orphan, the widower and the broken-hearted father, mourning brothers and sisters and friends take this handkerchief and wipe their tears away forever. “Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy” (Jeremiah 31:16).
“Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isaiah 26:19). And with this same handkerchief, he wipes away all other tears from our eyes (Revelation 7:17; 21:4).

**Angels**
Our Lord Jesus left something else in his tomb. He left angels behind him and made the grave …

> A cell which angels use  
> To come and go with heavenly news

Angels were not in the tomb before, but, at his resurrection, they descended. One rolled away the stone, and others sat where the Saviour’s body once lay. I have never read that our Master has recalled the angels from the sepulchres of his saints. And we are assured that when his Lazaruses die, the angels of God carry their souls into the bosom of their Lord. And their bodies shall be watched by guardian spirits, as surely as Michael kept the body of Moses until the resurrection.

**A Way Out**
Another thing was left behind in the tomb by our blessed Redeemer. A way out. He left an open passage from the tomb. The stone was rolled away. Death is, for God’s elect, a prison without bars or doors. The open tomb tells me there is a Door open in Heaven. The risen Christ is the Way out of death for us. By his resurrection from the dead, we have been raised from spiritual death. God has “quickened us together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5).

> From darkest night to brilliant light,  
> O praise his name, he lifted me!
Our Saviour’s resurrection is the pledge of our resurrection. It is that by which we have been forever saved from the second death. We were raised from the dead with him representatively. We have been raised by him spiritually in the first resurrection, the new birth. And we shall be raised from the dead physically in the last day, when our bodies are raised in his likeness.

Our mighty Samson has pulled up the posts and carried away the gates of the grave with all their bars. The key is taken from the girdle of death and is held in the hand of the Prince of Life. As Peter, when he was visited by the angel, found that his chains fell off, while iron gates opened before him of their own accord, so shall the saints find ready escape at the resurrection morning. Yes, we shall sleep a while, each one in his resting-place, but we shall rise again in the morning, for the stone is rolled away. A mighty angel rolled away the great stone; and when he had done the deed, he sat down upon the stone. His garment was white as snow, and his face like lightning; and as he sat on the stone he seemed to say to death and hell, “Roll it back again if you can”! That mighty Angel who rolled away the stone from the tomb for us is Christ himself!

Light
Our risen Saviour left one more thing behind in his tomb for us. Tombs are places of utter darkness. But our Lord Jesus left in his tomb the brilliant light of life and immortality.

God “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, 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” (2 Timothy 1:9-11).
Our Lord Jesus Christ went into the tomb and illuminated it with his presence, “the lamp of his love is our guide through the gloom”. He has brought life and immortality to light by the gospel; now in every cemetery there is a light which shall burn through the watches of earth’s night till the day break the shadows flee away, and the resurrection morn shall dawn.

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming … But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: 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. 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. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. 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. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and
as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 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. 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. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, 35-58).
Chapter 58

“And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? 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 there 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: And how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him. 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 sepulchre; 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. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. 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. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. 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, 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” (Luke 24:13-35).

“He Opened To Us The Scriptures”

That which is here revealed is so precious, so sweet, so heavenly that it hardly needs explanation. Indeed, it cannot be explained to any who have not experienced it for themselves. As they walked together, our Lord Jesus opened the scriptures to these two disciples. “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” Robert Hawker, commenting on those words, wrote, “Hence we are taught, as plain as words can make it, that the whole body of scripture is concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the Pearl of Great Price in this field of his Divine Revelation. As he drew near these two disciples in the way, may he draw near to us every time we open the Book of God. As he opened to them the scriptures, may he open the scriptures to us by his Spirit. As his presence and his doctrine
caused their hearts to burn within them, O may he cause our hearts to burn within us when we read and study the Sacred Volume.

The fact is, we have read the Bible with no profit to our souls and no understanding of its message, until we realize that the message of holy scripture is the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose of the Bible is the revelation of Christ.

I fully agree with Martin Luther, who wrote, “There is not a word in the Bible which can be understood without reference to the cross … As we go to the cradle only in order to find the baby, so we go to the scriptures only to find Christ.”

Robert Murray M‘Cheyne, who lived long before anyone dreamed of electric lights, said to his congregation at Christ’s Church in Dundee, Scotland, “When you are reading a book in a dark room, and find it difficult, you take it to a window to get more light. So take your Bible to Christ.”

Christ is the scope of scripture, the sum and substance of divine Revelation. Take Christ out of this Book and all that is left is processed wood, with gilded edges, wrapped in leather covers.

**One Message**

The one thing I want you to see in this study is this fact. The Bible is a Book about the Lord Jesus Christ. How I wish I could get every man who claims to be a preacher to see this! With regard to the Book of God, Christ is “the key of knowledge”. Without the key, men can never unlock the Chest and discover its riches. They just fumble. The Bible is not a book about science, but the Book about Christ. This is not a book about morality, but the Book about Christ. This is not a book about history, politics, philosophy, or law. It is not even a book about prophecy, church dogma, or theology. This is a HIM-BOOK. It is all about HIM, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not enough just to preach the Book, we are sent of God to preach the message of
the Book, and the message of this Book is Jesus Christ and him crucified. There is not a page in this Book that does not speak of Christ, not a page!

The Son of God tells us plainly that he is the message and theme of holy scripture, that he is the living Word of whom the written Word speaks. He said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself … And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, 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 the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 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” (Luke 24:27, 44-47).

The Apostle Paul shows us that the preaching of Christ is synonymous with preaching all the counsel of God, for Christ is all the counsel of God. In Acts 20:26, 27 he said, to the Ephesian elders, “Wherefore 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 1 Corinthians 2:2 he wrote, to the Church at Corinth, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” In both places, he is telling us the same thing. Christ and him crucified, is all the counsel of God, for all that God Almighty has purposed, decreed, revealed and given to the sons of Adam is in Jesus Christ and him crucified. The Bible, the Word of God is a Book with one message, and that one message is redemption, righteousness, and eternal life in Christ.
The Old Testament Prophecies
The Old Testament scriptures speak of Christ, point us to Christ, and call us to faith in Christ. All the law, the prophets, and the psalms speak of our Redeemer. All the Old Testament declares, “The Redeemer is coming.”

From the moment that God announced in the Garden of Eden that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head (Genesis 3:15), Christ was the central fact and figure of Old Testament prophecy. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, and all the prophets spoke of him. Here are a few of the many prophetic statements that pointed directly to the coming of Christ, his glorious Person, and his redemptive work: Genesis 22:13, 14; 49:10; Deuteronomy 18:15-18; Psalms 2:7, 8; 45:6, 7; 110:3; Proverbs 8:22, 23; Song of Solomon 1:2-4; Isaiah 53:8-11; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 12:10; Malachi 3:1. Job spoke of Christ as his Redeemer, whom he expected to see in his flesh in resurrection glory. Enoch prophesied of Christ’s glorious second advent, of his coming to the earth in the last day with ten thousands of his saints.

The Old Testament Types
In addition to the direct prophecies about the coming of Christ, God gave numerous types and pictures to foreshadow his coming. The types of Christ and his redemptive works are so numerous that I cannot begin to name them. But let me mention just a few. They may be divided into three different categories.

Typical People
Typical Things
Noah’s Ark (Genesis 6), The Ram Caught in a Thicket (Genesis 22:8-13), Jacob’s Ladder (John 1:51), The Brazen Serpent (John 3:14-16), The Paschal Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7), The Scapegoat (Leviticus 16:21), The Manna (John 6:32, 33), The Smitten Rock (1 Corinthians 10:4), The Altar of Sacrifice (Hebrews 13:10), The Mercy-seat (1 John 2:1, 2).

Typical Places
The Tabernacle (John 1:14), The Temple (John 2:18-20), The Cities of Refuge (Hebrews 6:18).

The lists could be greatly expanded. I have not even

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1, 2 Peter in Acts 2, Stephen in Acts 7, and Paul in Acts 13 delivered sermons that summarized the entire history of the Old Testament. And the subject of each of their sermons was the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ and him crucified is the theme of holy scripture! “To him give all the prophets witness”! And to him give all the apostles witness. Every book of the Bible speaks of Christ. Let me show you just one thing revealed about Christ in each of the 66 books of holy scripture. Christ is the theme of every text, the subject of every page, and the message of every subject set forth in holy scripture. But space will permit me to show you just one thing revealing Christ in every book of the Bible.

In Genesis he is the Seed of the Woman. In Exodus he is the Paschal Lamb. In Leviticus he is the Atonement for Sin. In Numbers he is the Brazen Serpent. In Deuteronomy he is the City of Refuge. In Joshua he is Rahab’s Scarlet Cord. In Judges he is the Angel of the Lord. In Ruth he is our Kinsman Redeemer. In 1 Samuel he is the Slayer of our Enemies. In 2 Samuel he is the Gracious King. In 1 Kings he is the Builder of his Temple. In 2 Kings he is the Great Prophet. In 1 Chronicles he is the Ark of Blessing. In 2 Chronicles he is the Defender Of his People. In Ezra he is the Restorer of his People. In Nehemiah he is the Rememberer of his People. In Esther he is the Preserver of his People. In Job he is the Daysman. In Psalms he is the Good Shepherd. In Proverbs he is the Wisdom of God. In Ecclesiastes he is the Teacher of Wisdom. In Solomon’s Song he is the Beloved of his Church. In Isaiah he is the Substitute for Sinners. In Jeremiah he is the Lord our Righteousness. In Lamentations he is the Lord our Portion. In Ezekiel he is the Glory of the Lord. In Daniel he is the Messiah the Prince. In Hosea he is God my Husband. In Joel he is the Hope of his People. In Amos he is the Sifter of his People. In Obadiah he is the Searcher of Hearts. In Jonah he is the Sovereign Deliverer. In Micah he is Bethlehem’s Infant. In Nahum he is the Great One. In Habakkuk he is the Faithful One. In Zephaniah he is the Mighty One.
mentioned all the instituted, ceremonial types, the sabbath days, and the many other instituted types of the Old Testament, all of which pointed to the Person and work of Christ as our Mediator. “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16, 17).

**The New Testament**

The doctrine and message of the entire New Testament is the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not have two Bibles, the Old and the New. We have one Bible. God’s Word is one, with two distinct parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed. The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. But the message in both the Old and the New is the same. The message is Christ.

The four gospels give us four views of Christ. Matthew
presents him as the promised King. Mark presents him as the Servant of God. Luke presents him as the Son of man. John presents him as the Son of God. The four gospels tell us that the Redeemer has come.

The Book of Acts tells us that the Redeemer is enthroned. The Book of Acts demonstrates that our Lord Jesus Christ was the singular subject of preaching in the earliest days of Christianity. The words “preach”, “preached”, and “preaching” are used thirty-seven times in the Book of Acts. It is not insignificant that every time they are used the subject preached was Jesus Christ and the resurrection! If the Book of Acts is to be taken for our standard, it must be concluded that unless Christ has been preached no preaching has been done. That man who pretends to be a preacher but does not preach Christ and him crucified mocks the people who hear him, and rather than serving their souls he destroys them.

The Epistles reveal and explain the mysteries of Christ and his gospel, proclaiming the Redeemer’s doctrine: ruin by the Fall, redemption by the blood, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, showing us the universality of God’s mercy, love, and grace in Christ for chosen sinners out of every nation, kindred, tribe, and tongue. The Book of Revelation is a declaration of the sure triumph of Christ and his church by the gospel. The Book of Revelation tells us that the Redeemer is coming again. “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him” (Revelation 1:7).

“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; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. 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” (Revelation 5:9-14).

Behold the glories of the Lamb
Amidst his Father’s throne.
Prepare new honours for his Name,
And songs before unknown.

Let elders worship at his feet,
The church adore around,
With vials full of odours sweet,
And harps of sweeter sound.

Those are the prayers of the saints,
And these the hymns they raise;
Jesus is kind to our complaints,
He loves to hear our praise.

Eternal Father, who shall look
Into Thy secret will?
Who but the Son should take the Book
And open every seal?

He shall fulfil Thy great decrees,
The Son deserves it well;
Lo, in his hand the sovereign keys
Of heaven, and death, and hell!

Now to the Lamb that once was slain
Be endless blessings paid;
Salvation, glory, joy remain
Forever on Thy head.

Thou hast redeemed our souls with blood,
Hast set the prisoner free;
Hast made us kings and priests to God,
And we shall reign with Thee.

The worlds of nature and of grace
Are put beneath Thy power;
Then shorten these delaying days,
And bring the promised hour.

Isaac Watts

“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” (Revelation 19:6).

The whole message of the Bible is Jesus Christ and him crucified. Christ is the living Word of whom the written Word speaks. If we could squeeze the whole Volume of Inspiration down to its very essence and substance, we would find Christ, only Christ, and nothing but Christ. Our Lord said, concerning the whole Volume of the holy scriptures, “They testify of me” (John 5:39). The purpose of the Holy Spirit in moving men to write the scriptures was to reveal Christ. That is the only purpose for which the Inspired Volume was given (John 16:14). To use the scriptures for any other purpose is to misuse and
abuse them.

The Ordinances Of The Gospel
The only two ordinances of worship prescribed in the New Testament are designed to focus our hearts upon Christ. Baptism is a symbolic burial and resurrection with him (Romans 6:3-6). The Lord’s Supper is a symbolic remembrance of Christ and his great work of redemption as our Substitute (1 Corinthians 11:24-26).

Christ is the message of the Book of God, in the Old Testament prophecies, in the Old Testament types, in the New Testament, and in the ordinances of divine worship. In the Book of God we read about Christ. In believer’s baptism we confess Christ. In the Lord’s Supper we remember Christ.

“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” (John 20:30, 31).

I cannot find better words to express what I so earnestly want you to see than these, which were spoken by C. H. Spurgeon to his congregation in London many years ago …

“Brethren, we should always read scripture in this light; we should consider the Word of God to be as a mirror into which Christ looks down from heaven; and, then, we looking into it see his face reflected as in a glass darkly, it is true, but still in such a way as to be a blessed preparation for seeing him as we shall see him face to face. This Volume contains Jesus Christ’s letters to us, perfumed by love. These pages are the garments of our King and they all smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. Scripture is the golden chariot in which Jesus rides, and it is paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem. The scriptures are the swaddling
bands of the holy child, Jesus; unroll them, and you find your Saviour.”

When you read the Word of God, look for Christ. When you study the Word of God, study Christ. When you talk about the Word of God, talk of Christ. When you live by the Word of God, live Christ. And when you preach the Word of God, preach Christ.

**Preach Christ**
The American Puritan, Cotton Mather, instructed his students with these wise and needful words of counsel “Among all the subjects with which you feed the people of God, I beseech you, let not the true Bread of Life be forgotten; but exhibit as much as you can of the glorious Christ unto them; yea, let the motto upon your whole ministry be, ‘Christ is all!’”

What a blessing it would be if every man who claims to speak for God, who claims to be a gospel preacher, would heed those words! How blessed the church of God would be if those who fill her pulpits were determined to preach and teach nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified!

That was Paul’s determination (1 Corinthians 2:2). It ought to be every preacher’s determination. Any man who is sent of God to preach is sent of God to preach Christ crucified, always, in all places, in all his fulness (1 Corinthians 1:17-24). Christ crucified is “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

He is the singular subject of holy scripture. He is the sum and essence of all true doctrine. He is the life of all gospel ordinances. He is the secret ingredient of all true worship. He is the Mercy-seat in whom God meets with men. He is the motive of all godliness, obedience, service, and devotion. He is the reward of heavenly glory. Jesus Christ is our God. Jesus Christ is our Saviour. And Jesus Christ is salvation. He is the Way to heaven; and he is Heaven. He is the Revealer of truth, and he is Truth. He is the Giver of Life; and he is Life. “Christ is all!”
When we talk about divine sovereignty, we are declaring that Jesus Christ is Lord. When we proclaim God’s glorious work of predestination, we are showing how that sinners have been predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ. God’s election is his choice of some to everlasting salvation in Christ and for Christ’s sake. Total depravity, a thoroughly biblical doctrine, is God’s revelation of our need of Christ. Limited atonement is the biblical assurance of effectual redemption and grace by Christ, the declaration that all for whom Christ died shall be saved. Irresistible grace, or effectual calling, is the almighty, irresistible revelation of Christ in the soul by the Holy Spirit, which causes the chosen to come to him. Regeneration is the implanting of Christ in us. Justification is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to all his redeemed. Faith is trusting Christ. Sanctification is Christ being formed in us, begun in regeneration and consummated in glorification. Perseverance is Christ holding our hearts by grace and keeping us in life and faith. Baptism is the believer’s public confession of faith in Christ. Being symbolically buried in the watery grave and raised with him, we confess our faith in his finished work of redemption as our Substitute. The Lord’s Supper is our blessed remembrance of Christ. Eternal life is knowing Christ. Heaven is being with Christ and like Christ perfectly and forever. Preaching is telling people about Christ. Anything else is not preaching. Call it what you may; but it is not preaching!
“Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26).

The Necessity

Our Lord Jesus is walking along the Emmaus Road, talking to two of his disciples, who are terribly perplexed by the fact that he had been delivered by the chief priests unto Pilate, condemned and crucified. The risen Redeemer was standing before them, and they said, “We had trusted.” How sad! Had they given up their trust? Were they now saying, “We trust him no more”? “We had trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.” In verses 25 and 26 our Saviour answers them with a word of stern reproof and blessed instruction.

Here is his word of reproof. “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken” (v. 25). The most foolish, God dishonouring thing in this world is unbelief. And when that unbelief is found in his own, it is even more foolish and more God dishonouring! That is our Saviour’s word of stern reproof. Let us lay it to heart.

But I want to call your attention to the word of instruction found in verse 26. It is cast in the form of a two part question “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” Our Lord Jesus here asserts again what he had so often told them, that there was an imperative, an absolute necessity that he suffer all that he suffered in Gethsemane,
Gabbatha, and Golgotha. And he tells them that one aspect of that necessity was the fact that he could never have entered into his glory had he not suffered all those things as our Surety, Substitute, and Saviour.

**God’s Greatest Work**

Without question, the most wondrous of all God’s works is the work of redemption. When we attempt to contemplate what that work involved, we are lost in astonishment. When we think of the unutterable depths of shame and sorrow into which the Lord of glory entered to save us, we are awed and staggered. A. W. Pink said:

“That the eternal Son of God should lay aside the robes of his ineffable glory and take upon him the form of a servant, that the Ruler of heaven and earth should be ‘made under the law’ (Galatians 4:4), that the Creator of the universe should tabernacle in this world and ‘have not where to lay his head’ (Matthew 8:20), is something which no finite mind can comprehend; but where carnal reason fails us, God-given faith believes and worships.”

As we trace the path of our Saviour from the throne of life to the tomb of death and behold him who was rich, for our sakes, becoming poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich, we cannot fathom the depths of the wonders before us. We know that every step in the path of our Redeemer’s humiliation was ordained in the eternal purpose of God. Yet, it was a path of immeasurable sorrow, unutterable anguish, ceaseless ignominy, bitter hatred, and relentless persecution that, at last, brought the Beloved Son of God, the Darling of heaven, to suffer the painful, shameful death of the cross. Who could ever have imagined such things as these?

Standing at the foot of the cross, as I behold the Holy One nailed to the cursed tree, covered with his own blood and the spit of an enraged mob, made sin, forsaken, and cursed of God
his Father, yet, realizing that this is the work of God’s own hand, I am lost in astonishment. I am filled with awe (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13). Samuel Stennett wrote:

Yonder, amazing sight, I see!
The incarnate Son of God
Expiring on the cursed tree,
And weltering in his blood.

Behold, a purple torrent run
Down from his hands and head,
The crimson tide puts out the sun;
His groans awake the dead.

The trembling earth, the darkened sky,
Proclaim the truth aloud;
And with the amazed centurion, cry,
“This is the Son of God”!

A Question
Awed as I am with reverence for my crucified Lord, still there is a question that I cannot suppress, a question that reason and sound judgment cannot fail to ask. The question is, Why? Why did the Son of God suffer such a death? Why did God so torment his beloved Son and kill him in such an horribly ignominious way?

Was it to save my soul? I know that he did so that I might live. He suffered, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring me to God. But was there no other way for the omnipotent God to save me? Was all this done to demonstrate the greatness of God’s love to me? Indeed it was (Romans 5:8; 1 John 3:16; 4:9, 10).

Jesus, who left his throne on high,
Left the bright realms of bliss,
And came to earth to bleed and die,
Was ever love like this?

But, surely, God could have revealed his love to me in some other way. Why did he slay his Son? What necessity was there for the Son of God to suffer and die upon the cursed tree?

Only one answer can be found to that question. The justice of God had to be satisfied. There was no necessity for God to save anyone. Salvation is altogether the free gift of his grace. But, having determined to save his elect from the ruins of fallen humanity, the only way God could save his people and forgive their sins was by the death of Christ. “Without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). The justice of God had to be satisfied in order for God to save his people; and the only thing that could ever satisfy the justice of God is the blood of Christ.

I want to show you from the Word of God both the necessity and the blessedness of Christ’s satisfaction of divine justice by his death on the cross. This is a doctrine of utmost importance. It is the glory of the gospel and the revelation of the glory of our God. It is the satisfaction of divine justice by the death of Christ that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. Take the cross out of Christianity, take away the satisfaction of Christ by his death upon the cross, and Christianity is of no more value and benefit to the souls of men than Judaism, Islam, or Hinduism. It is of paramount importance, because without satisfaction for sin, there could be no salvation from it.

Among the countless damnable heresies that are embraced and taught by men, none is more common and none so destructive to the souls of men as the denial of Christ’s
Hebrews 2:9, 10
Perhaps Hebrews 2:9, 10 states the necessity of Christ’s satisfaction for sin more clearly than any other single text. In it we see that he is Jesus, our Saviour, the Christ of God. We see in him the fulness of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9), the fulness of grace (John 1:14; Colossians 1:19), and the fulness of redemption (Ephesians 1:7). We see him as Christ, our Redeemer, the Son of God, the Son of man, the Lord our Righteousness. We see him as our all (1 Corinthians 1:31). Do you see him? If you do, flesh and blood has not revealed him to you, but our Father in heaven.

“Who was made a little lower than the angels.” He who made the angels was made a little lower than the angels. He was made of the seed of woman, made to be a man, “made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law” (Galatians 4:4, 5). This is the reason for the incarnation. This is why Christ was made a little lower than the angels …

“For the suffering of death.” The Son of God came into this world for the purpose of suffering death. He did not come to be an earthly monarch in Jerusalem. He did not come to establish a new religion. He did not come to be a reformer, or a mere example of morality and virtue. Christ, the Son of God, became a man so that he might die in the place of men and redeem them. He came here to die, because there was no other way for his people to be saved and live. We see this too, since he suffered and died in the place of his people, the Lord Jesus Christ is now …

13 “Unholy” in Hebrews 10:29 means “common”. Those who make the blood of Christ a common thing, without efficacy, without merit, are without hope! There is no other sacrifice for sin.
“Crowned with glory and honour” (Philippians 2:8-11). Christ is exalted. That Man who died for us at Calvary is now crowned with glory, given all honour, as the Lord of all. The God-man, who died for us, now rules the world to save those people for whom he died (John 17:2; Romans 14:9).

Now, look at the next line. Christ “was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” This statement, like all others, must be interpreted within its context and in the light of the entire Word of God. Is this a declaration that Christ died even for those for whom he refused to pray (John 17:9), for those who are not his sheep (John 10:11), for those who are vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Romans 9:22), for those from whom he has hidden both his works and his grace (Matthew 11:20-25)? Of course not! Does this statement mean that Christ died for those who suffer the wrath of God in hell? No! That would be a declaration that there are some for whom Christ shed his blood in vain and would be a denial of the efficacy of his atonement. What, then, is the meaning of this statement? “That he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”

Christ died not merely as a good example, or merely for the good of men, but as the divine Surety, in the room and place of men. However, the word “man” was added by our translators with no apparent reason, except to make the sentence read more easily. In the Greek text there is no word in this verse that should be translated “man”. The sentence literally should be translated, “That he by the grace of God should taste death for every”, or “for all”, or “for every one”. And the context makes it crystal clear that the Apostle was speaking of specific men. Our Lord Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every one of the sons he would bring to glory (v. 10), for every one of the brethren he is not ashamed to own (v. 11), for every member of the church, in the midst of which he will sing praise (v. 12),
for every one of the children God the Father had given him to save, for whose sake he assumed flesh and blood (v. 13), for every one of Abraham’s seed, God’s elect, whom he took hold of to save (v. 16).

Why was the Son of God made so humble as to suffer and die for his people? What necessity was there for his humiliation and death in the room and stead of his people? Read verse 10 …

“For it became him.” It was necessary, if God would save sinners and bring them to glory, that the Son of God must suffer in their room and satisfy all that the law and justice of God could demand. The scriptures plainly declare that there was a necessity for the death of Christ (Matthew 16:21; John 3:14). It was necessitated by the decree of God (Acts 2:23), Christ’s covenant engagements as our Surety (John 10:17, 18), the prophecies of the Old Testament (Matthew 26:54), and the election of grace. God did not have to save anyone; but since he has chosen to save some, the only way he could save them was by the satisfaction of justice, through the sacrifice of his own dear Son.

When Paul says, “it became him”, that it was necessary for God to slay his Son to save his people, lest we begin to think that this implies some weakness in God, he immediately describes our God with these words “for whom are all things and by whom are all things.” Here the Lord God is described as that One who is both the ultimate end and first cause of all things (Romans 11:36). All things are for him. He made all things for himself, for the glorifying of all the perfections of his nature (Proverbs 16:4; 2 Corinthians 5:18). And all things are by him. All things in nature, all things in providence, all things in redemption, and all things in grace are the work of our God.

I repeat myself deliberately, God did not have to save anyone; but since he has chosen to save some, the only way he could save them was by the satisfaction of justice through the sacrifice of his own dear Son.
“In bringing many sons unto glory.” This is an intimation of God’s gracious designs toward his elect. Those whom Christ came to save are many, and they were already the sons of God by eternal adoption and divine predestination long before Christ came to redeem them (Galatians 4:4-6). In the covenant of grace our God declared, “I will be their Father, and they shall be my sons and daughters.” We were chosen to be the children of God from eternity. We were given power and authority to become the sons of God, and given the nature of God’s sons in regeneration (John 1:12, 13). And we were openly and manifestly declared to be the sons of God when we believed by faith in Christ. Our faith in Christ does not make us God’s sons. Adoption did that. Faith receives the adoption of sons and looks upon God through Christ as our Father (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15, 16).

The sons of God are many, a great multitude which no man can number, ten thousand times ten thousand. The many chosen of God. The many for whom Christ gave his life a ransom. The many for whom his blood was shed for the remission of sins. The many made righteous by his obedience. The many for whom many mansions are prepared in the Father’s house. John Gill wrote:

“God has chosen them ‘through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth’, to the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ! Christ died for them, and by means of his death, they receive the promise of eternal inheritance, and the inheritance itself. God calls them by his grace to eternal glory, and makes them ‘meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

The Person by whom God’s elect are brought to glory is Christ, “the Captain of their salvation.” He is called “the Captain” of our salvation because he is the One in charge of it, the One responsible for it, the One whose arm alone has accomplished it.

As the Captain of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ was
“made perfect through sufferings”. That is to say, the way, the means by which our great Saviour saved us and perfected, or completed his work as the Captain of our salvation was by his perfect sufferings and death as our Substitute. Apart from his sufferings for the satisfaction of justice there could have been no salvation. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered: And being made perfect, he became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8, 9).

It was necessary for Christ to suffer and die on the cross under the wrath of God to save his people. He did not have to save us. But if he saved us he could not save in any other way. Justice demanded it (Proverbs 16:6; 17:15; Romans 3:24-26; 1 Peter 3:18).

This is what the Spirit of God teaches us in Hebrews 2:9, 10: since it was the design, purpose, and pleasure of the Almighty to bring some of the sons of men into eternal glory and happiness as the sons of God by Christ, it was necessary for Christ, the Son of God, to suffer all that the law and justice of God required for the punishment of sin, dying under the wrath of God as our Substitute.

I am not saying that the satisfaction of Christ procures the love of God for us. It does not. The death of Christ is the fruit of God’s love, not the cause of it. But I am saying, it is the death of Christ and the satisfaction of justice by his death that opens the way into the embraces of God’s arms. We could never have been reconciled to God without the shedding of Christ’s blood. Gill again states:

“Let me observe to you something relating to experience, which you would do well to lay up in your minds. It may be of use to you hereafter, when you may be tempted to doubt of your interest in Christ’s satisfaction. Have you any reason to believe that you have, at any time, had communion with God, in private or in public, in your closet, or in the family, or in the house of
God, under any ordinance, either the ministry of the Word, or prayer, or the Supper of the Lord? Then you may be assured Christ has made satisfaction for you; or you would never have enjoyed such communion.”

Six Statements
Here are six statements that simply cannot be refuted and must not be ignored. First, all men and women by nature, since the fall of our father Adam, are sinners, alienated from God.

“All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). As sinners, we are alienated from the life of God and have become enemies unto God. The wages of our sin and enmity to God is death.

Second, every transgression must receive its just recompense of reward (Hebrews 2:2). All sin must be punished, either in the sinner or in the sinner’s Substitute. The law, being broken, accuses of sin, condemns the sinner, and demands death. Unless satisfaction is made, the sentence of the law must be executed. The sanction of the law is death. It can never be abrogated, changed, altered, or abated. God will never relax his justice! “The soul that sinneth, it shall die”! (Ezekiel 18:2). But third …

It is the will of God to save sinners. “He delighteth in mercy”! God has decreed the salvation of some. Christ came to save some. There are some people in this world who must be saved, because it is the will of God to save them; and God’s will cannot be frustrated (John 10:16). Every chosen sinner (2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14), every predestined son (Romans 8:29, 30), every heir of the covenant (Ephesians 1:3-7), and every child of Adam whose name was written in the Lamb’s Book of Life from the foundation of the world must be saved (Revelation 13:8). There is no possibility that even one of God’s elect will perish! However, fourth …

It is impossible for a holy and just God to save any sinner apart from the satisfaction of justice (Hebrews 9:22).
God declares, “I will by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:7). I know that God is omnipotent, almighty, and sovereign. He does what he will! Nobody on this earth declares that glorious truth more fully, more frequently, or more forcibly than I do. But God cannot do that which is contrary to his nature and character. We do not rob God of his sovereignty when we repeat the declaration of scripture and say, “God cannot lie.” He who is the Truth cannot lie. Neither do we rob God of his sovereignty when we assert this truth of holy scripture: God cannot forgive sin without the satisfaction of justice. The just, holy, and true God must punish sin.

Fifth, the only way the justice of God could ever be satisfied is by the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ (Job 34:23; Romans 3:24-26). And sixth ...

God could not die, and man could not satisfy; but the God-man both died and satisfied. Two facts demonstrate clearly that there was no other way for justice to be satisfied. Only the death of Christ upon the cross could do it. The love of God the Father for his Son proves it. Would God Almighty slay his darling Son, if there were any other way to save his people consistent with his justice? And the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane proves it (Matthew 26:39). If the salvation of his people could be accomplished by any means other than his death upon the cross, would not God the Father have granted his tormented Son the desire of his soul?

What can justice satisfy?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
What can God’s law magnify?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
Oh, precious is the flow,
That makes me white as snow!
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!
Robert Lowry

It is impossible for God in his holiness to punish any sinner for whose sins justice has been satisfied by the blood of Christ (Isaiah 53:11 Romans 8:1-4). The law has no claim upon an executed felon. Every sinner who trusts the Lord Jesus Christ has been chosen, redeemed, and called, and must be forever saved!

**Christ’s Glory**

There is something else suggested in Luke 24:26. Christ could not have entered into his glory except by his suffering and death as our Substitute, by which justice was satisfied, righteousness was brought in, his work was finished, and the people he came to save were saved. His question reads, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” We are convinced by Holy Spirit conviction of righteousness, because he has ascended to the Father (John 16:11; Romans 14:9; Philippians 2:8-11).

What a horrible evil sin is. Nothing but the blood of Christ could make satisfaction for it. God Almighty will punish sin. The death of Christ as the sinner’s Substitute demonstrates the strictness of God’s holy law. Yet, there is a way open for sinners to come to God. Christ is the Way. He has made satisfaction for sin. If you trust him, if you come to God by faith in him, he made satisfaction for your sin.

Let us ever admire and adore the perfections of our God (Psalm 85:10, 11). Admire his love. Adore his mercy. Rejoice in his grace. Stand in awe of his wisdom, holiness, justice, and truth. All shine forth gloriously in the satisfaction of Christ. “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” Divine wisdom found a ransom for our souls in Christ. Holiness approved of it. Justice
is satisfied with it. Truth proclaims it. “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?”

Because he suffered, bled and died,
Because he reigns, our God on High,
Because He’s just to justify,
Our Saviour shall be satisfied!

“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”
“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” (Luke 24:29).

“Abide With Us”

Can the Son of God be forced to do anything? Can man compel the Christ of God, by any means, to anything? The answer to those questions may surprise you. As the Lord Jesus walked along the Emmaus road with these two disciples, when they got close to the village and started to turn in, “he made as though he would have gone further” (Luke 24:28). His feet were turned to go on down the road, but not his heart. His heart was still with them. He acted like he was going to leave them, because he wanted to constrain them to constrain him to abide with them. He wanted to make them want him.

Examples
There are other examples of this kind in the scriptures. You will remember that one dark night when the disciples were on the sea, a terrible storm arose. They were terrified. Suddenly, they saw a figure walking across the raging waves of the sea. Like here, the disciples did not know that it was their Saviour. As he approached their storm-tossed boat, it appeared that he was going to walk right by them. Then, “they cried out for fear.” As soon as he heard their cry, he stopped; and “straightway Jesus
spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.”

As the Lord Jesus made his way to Calvary, having set his face like a flint to go to Jerusalem, that he might suffer and die in our room and stead, nothing could stop him. Nothing could even cause him to take a backward glance over his shoulder, or break his stride. But, just as he was going out of Jericho, he heard a poor, blind beggar cry out, “Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me.” And, immediately, “Jesus stood still.”

On another occasion, a poor, desperate Canaanite woman came to him crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word” (Matthew 15:22, 23). He made as though he did not hear her. Why was that ear, which was always open to the call of misery, closed to this woman? Why did he answer her not a word? It was because he wanted to open her heart wider, wide enough to receive the blessing he was about to bestow.

That is often the way he works with us. Our blessed Saviour often makes it appear that he will leave us, or that he has left us, that he may graciously cause us to cry after him. Oh, how he loves for us to cry after him! Oh, how the Son of God loves for us to entreat him not to leave us! He does so, because he ever delights to abide with us.

Our dear Lord often proves our love by withholding his mercies until we know our need of his mercy. He has promised to do us good. He has promised to bless us. He has promised that he will never leave us, nor forsake us. But he says, “I will yet for this be enquired of to do it” (Ezekiel 36:37). He loves to draw out our desires after him, because it is good for us, and because he delights to hear us express our need of him.

That is how he dealt with Jacob at Peniel. Remember, it was not Jacob who wrestled with the Lord. It was the Lord who wrestled with Jacob. He had come for the purpose of blessing his chosen one; but he would not do so until Jacob had to have
him. He said to Jacob, “Let me go, for the day breaketh.” But Jacob was in desperate need. He cried, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Genesis 32:26). And the Lord blessed him.

We have another remarkable and instructive example of our Saviour’s gracious dealing in this manner with his chosen in the Song of Solomon 5:2-16. I urge you to read that passage with great care, asking God the Holy Spirit to apply its message to your heart.\textsuperscript{14}

So it was here in Luke 24. As they drew near to Emmaus, our Lord “made as though he would have gone further”, because he wanted to constrain them to constrain him to abide with them. And so we read in our text, “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” (v. 29).

Christ, our Hope, our Strength, our God,
You have redeemed us by Your blood;
Through You alone we’re saved from sin;
You’ve proved Yourself the sinner’s Friend!

Often when gathered in this place,
You’ve come with tokens of Your grace,
And blessed the preaching of Your Word,
Come again, beloved Lord!

Enter our hearts and show Your face;
Abide with us, dear Prince of Peace;

\textsuperscript{14} This passage in the Song of Solomon (5:2-16) is of such tremendous importance that I encourage you to read my comments on it in my \textit{Discovering Christ in the Song of Solomon}, \textit{(Published by Evangelical Press, Darlington, England - 2005)}, as well as those by Roger Ellsworth in \textit{He is Altogether Lovely} \textit{(Published by Evangelical Press, Darlington, England 1998)}, and John Gill’s \textit{Exposition of the Book of Canticles} \textit{(Published by the Primitive Baptist Library of Carthage, Illinois - 1980)}. 
Come now and make each heart Your own,
Your house, Your temple, and Your throne!

Keep us from grieving You with sin,
Subdue our lusts and reign within;
Abide with us for evermore;
Make us abide in You, our Lord!

“You abide with us.” That is my unceasing prayer. Oh, how I pray that he will abide with me, abide with my family, abide with the local church family he has given me, and abide with you, for without him we can do nothing. Without him, we are nothing!

“They Constrained Him”
“They constrained him.” What a remarkable word that is! The specific word here translated “constrained” is a very strong word. It means, “to compel by use of force.” It is only used in one other place in the scriptures. It is used in Acts 16:15, where Lydia constrained Paul and Silas to abide in her house.

“They constrained him.” The words might be translated, “They held him by force.” How? By what force was the Lord of Glory constrained? How was he compelled? What force could force the Son of God to do anything? There is only one such force put before us in all the Book of God. Our Lord Jesus was constrained by the cry of these poor, needy souls, “Abide with us”. That cry constrained him to go in and “tarry with them”. He was not constrained by their faith. At the time, they did not know who he was. He was not constrained by any promise from his poor disciples. He was constrained by their need of him, by their felt need of that which only he could provide. So it is with us.
“Abide With Us”

His conversation had been so engaging, so heavenly and instructive, so sweet and delightful, so powerful and moving, so beneficial to their souls that they could not bear to have him part from them. So “they constrained him, saying, Abide with us.”

This is not the Master speaking to the disciples, but the disciples to the Master. It is not the Lord Jesus that is standing at the door and saying, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.” It is a pair of disciples that is saying, “Come in with us, blessed of the Lord. ‘Abide with us.’” And, as he blessed Jacob before parting from him, so here he went in and sat down with them.

When he did, he brought his blessing with him. He filled the house with the fragrance of his presence and the odour of the ointment of his grace. “He sat at meat with them” (v. 30). He gave them bread to eat, bread he had blessed especially in their presence for them (v. 30). He opened their eyes and caused them to know him (v. 31). He caused their hearts to burn within them (v. 32).

“They constrained him, saying, Abide with us”, because they were not willing to part with him. O Spirit of God, give us grace that we may follow the example of these disciples.

Abide with us, our Saviour,
Let not Your mercy cease;
From every foe defend us,
And keep our souls in peace.

Abide with us, our Saviour,
To us open Your Word,
That we may, now and ever,
Here find our blessed Lord.
Abide with us, our Saviour,
And guide us in Your light;
Increase to us Your favour,
And save us by Your might.

Joshua Stegmann

Our Need
Our blessed Saviour heals as many as have need of healing (Luke 9:11). He visits those who need him, and abides with them as long as he is needed. But he always departs from those who have no need for him (Matthew 19:1). If we would constrain the Lord Jesus to abide with us, we must, like these disciples, pour out our hearts’ need to him (Job 23:4; Isaiah 43:26).

Saviour, “abide with us”, because these are days of great trouble, heaviness and sorrow. “Abide with us”, because this world is empty without you. Life is death, if you are not with us. This world would be an empty place, a house left desolate without you, without the sound of your voice, or your footsteps. All is emptiness and cold without you. It is Christ who fills our lives, rejoices our hearts, and lights up our homes. He, and he alone gives us gladness in this wilderness. O blessed Saviour, “abide with us”!

“Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent”, because all is darkness without you. We do not know what lies before us, what our future is to be. We know the past, we know the present, but the future is hidden from us. For that future and all its uncertainties, we need you to be our Guide and our Protector. We need you to light up our path. We need you to defend us and keep us. We need you to comfort and cheer us. We need you to hold us by the right hand of your righteousness. We need you to carry us across the swelling Jordan. We need you to present us to the Father.

Who will fight for us, who will deliver us and keep us to the
last, in all changes, trials and sorrows? Abide with us. Leave us not, neither forsake us, O God of our salvation, O Rest of the weary, O Light of the dark, O Saviour of the lost, O Joy of the sorrowful, O Helper of the helpless, unchanging Companion, Friend and Brother, O blessed Kinsman, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning, the same yesterday, today, and forever, “abide with us”! Lead us out, lead us in, lead us along the way, lead us beside the still waters, lead us into your banqueting house, and let your banner over us be love!

“Abide with us”, because earth’s night is at hand. The sun of time is going down behind the hills. The end of all things is at hand. The day of the Lord hastens on. Satan is in a rage, “because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.” Antichrist is rampant everywhere. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse. Perilous times have come. Wars and rumours of wars cover the earth. Earthquakes and tsunamis, tornadoes and hurricanes cause men’s hearts everywhere to fail them for fear.

“If the foundations be destroyed, What shall the righteous do?” We can do nothing except constrain the Lord Jesus, crying, “abide with us”! “Abide with us” in all your mercy, love and grace, in all your strength and help, in all your joy and peace. “Abide with us” forever.

Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day,
Earth’s joys grow dim; its glories pass away!
Change and decay in all around I see.
Thou Who changest not, abide with me!

Henry F. Lyte

“He Went In”
I cannot fail to call your attention to the last sentence of verse 29. “And he went in to tarry with them.” Like these disciples, in the Song of Solomon we see the church in great importunity,
seeking her Beloved. And when she found him, she constrained him to abide with her. May God the Holy Spirit ever show us our constant need of our Saviour and constrain us to constrain him to “abide with us”.

“It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother’s house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please” (Song of Solomon 3:4, 5).

Let us, by crying constantly to our Saviour, constrain him to “abide with us”.
Chapter 61

“And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. 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. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, 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 the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 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. And ye are witnesses of these things. 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. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:36-53).
Several women, who were disciples of our Lord, got up early in the morning and came to the tomb where the Lord Jesus had been buried. They were bringing spices they had prepared for the body of their beloved Master. But when they arrived at the tomb, “they found the stone rolled away”, and saw that the Lord’s body was gone. Then two angels appeared to them and said, “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.” Immediately, they ran back into the city with the good news of the Lord’s resurrection. But when they told the apostles what they had seen and heard, “their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not” (v. 11).

That same day two of the disciples left Jerusalem to go to Emmaus. As they walked along the Emmaus road, they discussed the events of the past three days. Their hearts were heavy. Their minds were filled with confusion as they tried to understand the meaning of our Lord’s message to them in John 13-16, the prayer in John 17, and the significance of the Lord’s Supper he had taught them to observe. They were not able to comprehend why he had been crucified as a common criminal. Though he had clearly told them, the Spirit of God had not given them understanding; and they were terribly confused.

As they walked along the way discussing these things, the Lord Jesus drew near and walked with them. But they did not recognize him. In verse 17 he asked them, “What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?” Then Cleopas explained to him why they were so perplexed (vv. 18-24). Then the Saviour explained the scriptures to them, telling them how that all the law and prophets spoke of him (vv. 25-27). When they got to Emmaus,
the Lord went in to have supper with them. As he prayed at the table, their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Then he vanished out of their sight. The two disciples then looked at each other, and said, “Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (v. 32).

**Peace Commanded**

Immediately, these two men went back to Jerusalem and found the apostles and their brethren and told them all they had seen and heard. As they talked, suddenly, the Lord Jesus appeared in their midst, and said, “Peace be unto you” (v. 36).

What a gracious Saviour Christ is! “How truly blessed is it”, wrote Robert Hawker, “to behold, the gracious attention of the Lord Jesus, in thus affording such repeated testimonies of the reality of his resurrection to his disciples, both when separate, and when collected together.” Here he is, standing in the midst of his disciples, who just three days earlier had all shamefully forsaken him. One had denied him three times. All of them had been backsliders and cowards. Yet, when our Lord stood in the midst of these men, there was not a word of rebuke, not a tinge of anger, not even an indication of disapproval. Calmly, lovingly, graciously, our Lord said, “Peace be unto you”!

It is as though the Lord, freshly risen from the grave, had said, “Your sins are all forgiven. My blood has washed them all away. I will not charge you with sin.” Truly, the love of Christ is a love that surpasses all knowledge. It is his glory to pass over our iniquities, pardon our sins, and hide our transgressions. He “delighteth in mercy”. In his infinite heart there is an infinite willingness to forgive sin. He is more willing to forgive than we are to seek forgiveness.

Our all-glorious, ever-gracious Christ says to his fallen, sinful people, “Peace be unto you.” Where is the sinner who needs to fear such a Saviour? In the hand of Christ there is
mercy enough and to spare. He says, “Fury is not in me” (Isaiah 27:4). Christ is willing to save. Christ is willing to forgive. Christ is willing to restore the fallen. We who are so freely forgiven ought to love our dear Saviour and willingly render to him the obedience of our hearts. And surely we, who have been so freely forgiven, will freely forgive our brethren. Those who follow the Prince of Peace will be peaceable themselves; gentle, kind, charitable, and forgiving. Forgiven sinners are forgiving sinners.

Yet, as the Lord Jesus stood in the midst of his disciples, they were terrified. Even then they did not believe. Still, he was gracious. He tenderly condescended to minister to their weakness and infirmity. He said, “Why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts?” (v. 38). He might justly have scolded them and said, “Where is your faith? Why do you refuse to believe me, even when I stand before you?” But that is not his way. Instead of dealing harshly with his children, our Saviour gently stretched out his arms, and said, “Behold my hands.” If we can by faith behold the hands of our Saviour, his hands will remove our doubts, assure our hearts, and give us peace.

**Our Sovereign**

Try to picture the Lord Jesus Christ standing before his trembling, terrified, unbelieving disciples. Try to picture him standing before your own troubled heart. He says, “Behold my hands.” These are the hands that made the world. They are the hands of our Sovereign God and Saviour.

“For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker” (Psalm 95:3-6).

He who is our Saviour has the whole world in his hands.
Why should we be afraid? What is the cause for our unbelief? Is anything too hard for the Lord? We only fear when we look to our hands. “O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens … When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained: what is man, that thou visitest him?” (Psalm 8:1-3). Behold the hands of Christ, our sovereign Lord. These are the hands that made the world (Psalm 19:1-6).

The most absurd, foolish philosophy in the world is the philosophy of evolution. Learned idiots tell us that all the rare beauty, wonder, and precise order of heaven and earth simply evolved by chance. Yet, the same men, with all their science, technology, and art combined cannot even figure out a way to make a wriggling worm or an annoying gnat! An observation Thomas Watson made over 300 years ago is worth remembering, “To create requires infinite power. All the world cannot make a fly.”

Jesus Christ is not a creature of God. He is God the Creator. His are the hands that made the world; and his are the hands that rule the world (John 1:1-3; 3:35).

Behold the Man upon the throne
Who rules in heaven, earth, and hell:
That Man is Christ, our Saviour God,
His throne should all our fears dispel.

“The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.” The Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, sovereignly rules all things. Stephen Charnock wrote, “To be God and sovereign are inseparable.” Everything is absolutely dependent upon and controlled by the will and power of God. The beginning and the end of all things is God. Our Saviour’s sovereign control of all things as God should control our hearts
and give us peace, contentment and joy in all things.

The hands of our Saviour, who made all things and rules all things with total sovereignty, are the hands that rule all things for the eternal good of our souls (Romans 8:28). “If God be for us, who can be against us?”

Since all the downward tracks of time
God’s watchful eye surveys,
Oh, who so wise to choose our lot,
And regulate our days?

Good, when he gives, supremely good!
Nor less when he denies:
Even crosses from his sovereign hand
Are blessings in disguise.

Since none can doubt his matchless love,
Immeasurably kind,
To his unerring, gracious will
Be every wish resigned.

James Hervey

Our Surety

“Behold, my hands.” These are the hands of our sovereign God; and these are the hands of our covenant Surety and Good Shepherd. He said …

“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, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27, 28).

This is every believer’s security, satisfaction, and assurance before God. We are in his hands! God the Father put us in his hands as our covenant Surety before the world began. And as our Surety and our Good Shepherd the Lord Jesus assumed total
responsibility for our souls from everlasting. The shepherd alone is responsible for the sheep (John 6:37-40). The Lion of the tribe of Judah said, from old eternity, “I will be Surety for them” (Genesis 43:9); and God the Father laid upon him all responsibility for our souls.

**Our Substitute**

“Behold my hands.” Can you see them? The hands of our blessed Substitute.

“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet” (Psalm 22:14-16).

In a sense we all ought to be like Thomas. The other disciple said, “We have seen the Lord”! But Thomas said, “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” (John 20:25). Each one must see Christ for himself. By faith we see in his hands the wounds of our Substitute (Isaiah 53:4-6). Do you see those wounds in his hands? Can you hear them speaking to your heart?

Behold his hands, and hear them speak,
“I freely all forgive,
These wounds were for your ransom made,
I died that you might live”!

As I behold the wounds in the hands of my glorious Substitute, I am convinced that the justice of God is fully satisfied (Galatians 3:13), my sins are completely removed from
me (Hebrews 9:26), the Son of God loves me (1 John 3:16), and I shall never perish (1 John 2:1, 2).

Five bleeding wounds he bears,
Received on Calvary,
They pour effectual prayers,
They strongly plead for me.
Forgive him, O forgive they cry,
Nor let that ransomed sinner die!
Charles Wesley

**Our Security**

Are you terrified by your own weakness, insufficiency, and sin? Does Satan sometimes whisper in your ear, “You are sinking, you will prove a hypocrite at last, you will soon be mine”? Are you afraid? The Saviour says, “Behold my hands”! These are the hands of our security. We see this beautifully illustrated in Matthew 14:25-31.

When Peter saw the storm approaching, he was terrified and began to sink. Then he cried, “Lord, save me … And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him.”

On the sea of life many storms arise. The waves are high. The wind is strong. The clouds are heavy. We sometimes think we will surely fail, and that our vessel will be wrecked. But just when we think we are sinking, the Lord Jesus stretches forth his hand and catches us! Then all is well. Did he not say, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee … I will strengthen thee; yes, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness”? Child of God, you are safe and secure in his hands all the time. He will keep you from falling.

When the storms of life are raging, Stand by me;
When the world is tossing me, Like a ship upon the sea,
Thou who rulest wind and water, Stand by me.
In the midst of tribulation, Stand by me;
When the hosts of hell assail, And my strength begins to fail,
Thou who never lost a battle, Stand by me.

When I’m growing old and feeble, Stand by me;
When my life becomes a burden, And I’m nearing chilly Jordan,
O Thou “Lily of the Valley”, Stand by me.

Charles A. Tindley

Our Solace
Is your heart troubled and your mind perplexed? Listen our Saviour’s gentle reproof. “Why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands.” These are the hands of our solace. These are the hands of blessing and consolation. We read in verse 50, “And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.” He says to you and me, “Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God; believe also in me.”

Behold the Saviour’s hands, and see how he blesses his children (Mark 10:13-16). “Blessed is the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee” (Psalm 65:4). “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Romans 4:8).

Here is a sweet word of solace for God’s children. The hands that chasten us are the hands that bless us and make us whole. “Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty; for he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole” (Job 5:16, 17).

Here is a word of solace for God’s servants. Every true servant of God is in the hands of Christ. “He had in his right
hand seven stars … The seven stars are the angels (pastors) of the seven churches” (Revelation 1:16, 20).

**Our Salvation**

Child of God, our Saviour stretches out his arms to us and says, “Behold my hands.” These are the hands of our Sovereign, the hands of our Surety, the hands of our Substitute, the hands of our security, the hands of our solace.

There is a word here for those who are yet the children of wrath. Sinner, by the preaching of the gospel, the Son of God stretches out his arms to you, and says, “Behold my hands.” They are the hands of our Salvation! “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear” (Isaiah 59:1). Trust your soul to the hands of Christ. He is able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him. Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father but by him.

The Lord Jesus Christ stands before our poor, needy souls in the gospel as one full of tenderness, with mercy in his hands, and love in his heart. Believe him. Oh, believe him! He is the great Saviour of great sinners. He is a great Forgiver. Trust him, and you will find your transgressions put away and your sins pardoned forever. There’s mercy in his hands and grace in his command. He stretches out his hands to poor, needy sinners, and says, “Come unto me”!

The Son of God says, “Behold my hands.” Trust and be not afraid. But, let all refuse to trust him tremble. These are the hands of him who shall execute judgment in the last day. And it is written, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:31).

As the high priest was typical of our Lord Jesus in all other things, he typified our Saviour when he lifted up his hands to bless them, with the blessing commanded by God upon them (Numbers 6:22-27). So our Saviour, the true Nazarite having
fulfilled his vow, the true High Priest of Israel, and the true sin-atoning Sacrifice, commands the blessing of God upon his people. Our great High Priest ascended to heaven as he was blessing his people, as if to tell us that his blessing is forever perpetual. And, as in the case of Manoah (Judges 13:20), our all-glorious Christ ascended in the fragrance of his own incense.

Behold his hands, and worship him. Behold his hands, and walk before him with great joy, praising and blessing God. Your pierced hands, O blessed Saviour, are the instruments of new creation, the source of all blessings, the symbol of redemption, forgiveness, grace, and salvation, the display of your infinite love for us. Let us, now and forever, behold your hands with gratitude, confident faith, and joy.
“And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. 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. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, 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 the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 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. And ye are witnesses of these things. 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. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:36-53).
We generally assume that what a person has been he is and will be. With men that is sometimes a mistake. Men do change and are changed. But, with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, that is neither an assumption nor a mistake. He does not change and cannot be changed. What he has been he is now, and he shall forever be. Our Lord Jesus Christ is “the same, yesterday, and today, and forever.” He declares, “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.” It is he alone of whom it can be said, he “is, and was, and is to come.”

The two disciples who had walked with our risen Saviour along the Emmaus road, after the Lord Jesus made himself known to them, were so overwhelmed with joy that they seem to have forgotten why they had come to Emmaus. They immediately returned to Jerusalem to tell their brethren the good news (Luke 24:33, 35).

Then, in verse 36 we read, “And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them.” The disciples were gathered together, probably in the same large, upper room in which the Lord Jesus had instituted the Lord’s Supper. How troubled and perplexed they were. Then, “as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them.” Our blessed Saviour loves to meet with his saints when they are gathered together. He delights to reveal himself to us when we most need him.

In verses 36-53 Luke gives us a brief summary of those forty days between the resurrection and the ascension of our Redeemer. During those forty days, “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: 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” (Acts 1:3, 4).

**Peace Bestowed**

Let us look at the first appearance of our risen Lord in the midst of his assembled church described in verses 36-43. “Jesus himself stood in the midst of them”, uninvited, unexpected, undeserved, but most welcome. He stood in the centre to be near to them all. He appeared in the midst of them to bestow peace upon them all (vv. 36-43).

“And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. 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 showed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them.”

The Lord Jesus had now finished his blessed work of redemption. He had entered in once into the holy place. He had, with his own blood, obtained eternal redemption for his elect. And now he appeared in the midst of his disciples in exactly the same character and nature in which he had walked with them before, to bestow exactly the same blessing he had bestowed upon them in the days of his earthly ministry. Our risen Redeemer is the same in his person and grace as he has ever been. “Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you” (See John 14:27).

This is particularly blessed when we remember the men to whom these words were addressed. Our Lord Jesus spoke these
words to those very same disciples who three days before had shamefully forsaken him and fled. They had broken their promises. They had forgotten their professed readiness to die with him. They had been scattered, “every man to his own”, and left him to die alone. One of them had even denied him three times.

They were all “backsliding children” (Jeremiah 3:22). But the Lord Jesus had promised, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely” (Hosea 14:4). Therefore, “Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.” Not a word of rebuke is spoken. Not a single sharp reproof fell from his lips. Calmly and quietly he appeared in the midst of them, and spoke peace. “Peace be unto you”!

How free his love must be! Truly, his is love that passes knowledge! It is his glory to pass over iniquity, transgression, and sin! He “delighteth in mercy.” He is far more willing to forgive than we are to be forgiven, and far more ready to pardon than we are to be pardoned. There is in his great, almighty, infinite heart infinite forgiveness. Though our sins have been as scarlet, he makes them as white as snow. He has blotted them out, cast them behind his back, buried them in the depths of the sea, and remembers them no more.

Though, like these poor disciples, we are constantly stumbling and falling, constantly “backsliding children”, his forgiveness is free, full, and undeserved forgiveness. The peace and forgiveness he speaks to our troubled hearts is the same peace he spoke to them. It is peace obtained by the blood of his cross, flowing from our crucified, risen Saviour, the peace of complete redemption, perfect atonement and absolute forgiveness. He speaks peace to our souls, saying, “I have blotted out thy sins! ... Fury is not in me”! Christ is the Saviour who gives peace to needy sinners. In his pierced hands there is mercy enough and to spare. He raises the dead, revives the languishing, restores the fallen, and heals the wounded. There is
forgiveness with him, that he may be feared (Psalm 130:4).

**Peace Experienced**

Though he spoke peace, these poor souls were still incapable of enjoying it. “They were terrified and affrighted” (v. 37). Then our blessed Saviour gave these poor, troubled souls undeniable proof of his accomplished redemption, by which he assured their hearts, causing them to experience the peace he spoke (vv. 38-43).

“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 showed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them.”

It is one thing to hear the words, “Peace be unto you”, but it is something else to experience peace in your soul. And our Saviour causes his own to experience the peace he gives. He does not just say, “Have peace.” He causes us to know his peace in the blessed experience of grace, in the sweet experience of knowing him. He gives us peace!

He said, “Behold my hands and feet … touch me and see.” He stood before them, stretched out his nail pierced hands, and pointed to his wounded feet, through which the nails had passed, by which his body had been fastened to the cursed tree. Then he took “a piece of broiled fish and of an honeycomb … and did eat before them.” By these things, the Lord Jesus removed all their doubt and all their fear. So it is with us. We enjoy the sweet peace of redemption, forgiveness, and everlasting salvation as we handle our Saviour personally by faith in the sweet experience of his grace (1 John 1:1-3).

Those very same wounds, with which our Redeemer gave
peace to these disciples, convincing them of his accomplished redemption and of his triumph over death by his resurrection, are the wounds he perpetually and everlastingly spreads before our Father in heaven for us. There, as our mighty Advocate and Great High Priest, our Saviour pleads the merit of his sin-atoning blood and substitutionary death for our everlasting salvation.

Yes, the crucified, risen Christ has returned to heaven, “to appear in the presence of God for us” (Hebrews 9:24). His blood speaks to God for us (Hebrews 12:24). There he stands forever the “Lamb which had been slain” (Revelation 5:6). Christ is our great High Priest before the mercy-seat. He has our names engraved upon his heart as he stands before God, making intercession for us (Exodus 28:29, 30). That which the saints of old passionately desired and looked for has come to fruition in the intercession of our mighty Advocate. He has set us as a seal upon his heart, as a seal upon his arm, because of his love that is stronger than death (Song of Solomon 8:6).

What a blessed encouragement this is to me in times of spiritual barrenness and leanness of soul! There is One whose pierced hands and side plead for me, when I have no power to plead for myself. “If any man sin, we have”, says John, “an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1, 2).

Our Lord might have commanded his disciples to believe that he had risen. He might have sharply reproved their unbelief. Instead, in great mercy, he stooped to their need. He stooped to their weakness, and said, “Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold (literally: you shall behold!) my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see (literally: you shall see!); for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (vv. 38, 39).

What a great example our Saviour is to us in all things. When we are dealing with one another, let us ever remember his
gracious dealings with us. Weak disciples are disciples still. Weak brethren are brethren still. They need to be taught and led with patience, not upbraided and handled roughly. To the weak, let us become as weak that we might minister to the weak (1 Corinthians 9:22).

**Christ in the Midst**

Verses 36-43 describe our Lord’s first appearance to his assembled church after the resurrection. Here we see the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of his brethren, assembled with his saints. He appeared in their midst, he visited his church, when his disciples had acted very shamefully, fleeing from him at his betrayal and deserting him at his trial. They were unprepared and unbelieving, doubting his promise and refusing the testimony of his messengers. They greatly needed him, for they were like sheep without a shepherd. Yet, they had come together in his name, as his disciples, in loving memory of him. They lamented his absence and greatly desired him. Some among them testified that they had been with him, and told others what they saw, experienced, and heard him speak.

When he appeared in their midst, he spoke peace to his disciples, showed himself to them, permitted each of them to handle him, and proved himself to them again. Are not we in the same condition as these disciples? May we not hopefully look for our Lord Jesus to appear in our midst?

This is what we miss when we absent ourselves from the assembly of his saints. There was one disciple, a true disciple, a true believer, who was not present at this assembly. Thomas was not with his brethren in the house of God. We are not told why he was not present; but he was not there (John 20:24). Perhaps he thought he had something more important to do. Perhaps he was overcome with unbelief. Perhaps he was in a very low condition. We do not know. But this we do know: when his
Redeemer appeared in the midst of his brethren, Thomas was not there. I do not know, but I doubt Thomas ever missed another service. When you absent yourself from the house of God, you absent yourself from the ministry of the Word and the fellowship of your family. And you may absent yourself from the blessedness of Christ’s manifest presence, from the indescribable privilege of seeing him, hearing him, handling him, and feasting with him.

**Christ’s Doctrine**

In the next paragraph (Luke 24:44-48) our Lord Jesus gave his disciples a summary of his doctrine. He summarized everything he had taught them while he walked with them in the flesh.

“And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, 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 the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 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. And ye are witnesses of these things.”

First, in summarizing everything he had taught, the Lord Jesus now showed these disciples the meaning and message of the Old Testament scriptures. The risen Saviour is the same in his doctrine as he has ever been. “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, 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 the psalms, concerning me” (v. 44).

The most casual reading of the gospel narratives makes it clear that these men knew the Old Testament very well. They knew how it was written by inspiration of God. They knew how
it was compiled and preserved by divine providence. They knew its history and knew its letter. But its meaning and its message was hidden from their eyes, until the Saviour said, “Everything that you have read in the Old Testament, all the law, all the prophecies, all the types and ceremonies, all the rituals and sacrifices, and all the psalms and proverbs are about me.” Yet, even then, they did not understand his words. But “then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.”

The fact is no human being can understand the Book of God except as God himself gives him understanding. Spiritual discernment is the gift of God the Holy Spirit. A man can study Greek and Hebrew, learn everything there is to know about grammar, ancient biblical history, archaeology, philosophy, theology, hermeneutics, exegesis, and rhetoric, and still have absolutely no knowledge of holy scripture. The Bible is a Book of divine revelation that cannot be understood without divine illumination. Only God can take the things of God and show them to a man (1 Corinthians 2:9-15).

Can you imagine what it must have been like to have been present, to have heard that sermon, and to have received that blessed enlightenment? What a moment it must have been! What awe the disciples must have felt! How differently the Saviour’s words must have sounded! How majestic, how heavenly, how powerful! They now heard him as their risen Redeemer, coming from the other world to open their understanding. Now, for the first time, they understood all that he had taught them. Now, for the first time, they understood the vast, infinite importance of his mission in coming into the world. Now, for the first time, they began to know the meaning of his infinite grace, everlasting love, and immutable mercy as the Christ of God, their God, their Redeemer, their Saviour, and their Lord and King!
His Death
Then, the Lord Jesus spoke to his disciples about his death on the cross. He had done so many, many times before (Matthew 16:21; 17:22, 23; 20:18, 19; Mark 8:31, 32; 9:31; 10:33, 34; Luke 18:31-33). He did not speak of his death as an unhappy misfortune, or as a thing to be lamented, but as a necessity. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day” (v. 46). There are three things revealed here that must be understood. These three things are vital. No one understands the Bible who does not understand these three things.

1. The death of Christ was according to the will and purpose of God. He was delivered to death “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). He died in our place and room, as our Substitute, by the sovereign will and eternal decree of God, because “it pleased the Lord to bruise him.”

2. The death of God’s darling Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, was necessary for our salvation. Without the death of Christ, God’s law could never have been fulfilled, divine justice could never have been satisfied, sin could never have been put away, sinners could never have been pardoned, forgiven, justified, and made righteous before God, and God could never have shown mercy.

3. The cross of Christ was the only solution of a mighty difficulty, the only answer to that ancient question, “How can a man be just with God?” (Job 9:2). The cross untied the knot. It is the death of Christ upon the cursed tree that makes it possible for our God to be “a just God and a Saviour” (Isaiah 45:20). Because Christ once died, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, God is “just, and the Justifier” of the ungodly (Romans 3:26).

It is only by the blood of Christ crucified that sinners can draw near to God with boldness, with full assurance of faith, in confident hope of eternal life. Christ, by suffering and dying as
our Substitute in our stead, the just for the unjust, has made a way by which we can draw near to God. And his death guarantees that all for whom he suffered and died shall come to God by him!

Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-3). How did Christ die? He died voluntarily, by his own will. He said, “I lay down my life … The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” Our Lord Jesus died vicariously, as our Substitute in the place of his elect (2 Corinthians 5:21). And he died victoriously, triumphantly, having accomplished all that he intended to accomplish, having obtained eternal redemption for his people (Galatians 3:13).

The cross of Christ is all our hope, all our peace, all our salvation. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the cancellation of all our debt, the restoration of all our loss, the redemption of all God’s elect. “God forbid 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 determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

Upon the cross I see him bleed,
And by the sight from guilt am freed;
Christ crucified removed my sin,
And by his grace I’m born again.

To see my Saviour as he rose
Assures my faith, disarms my foes;
Satan’s assaults I overcome,
By pointing to my Saviour’s tomb.

Exalted on his glorious throne,
My Saviour makes my cause his own;
No good can I now be denied,
For Jesus lives, and will provide.
He looks, with tender pity down,
And holds for me the conqu’ror’s crown;
Though pressed with griefs and cares before,
My soul revives, nor asks for more.

By faith I see the day at hand
When in his presence I shall stand;
Then it shall be my endless bliss,
To see him where, and as he is.

**Repentance And Remission**

In verse 47 our Lord Jesus goes on to tell us that he died as our sin-atoning Substitute, “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Notice that our Saviour did not say that he died so that we could tell sinners to repent. Rather, he tells us that he died that we might proclaim repentance. There is a difference. When God commands all men everywhere to repent, he commands them to turn to him. But here our Saviour, by virtue of his death on the cross, commands us to preach repentance, that is to proclaim the turning of sinners to him. By virtue of his sin-atoning sacrifice, we proclaim liberty to the captives (Isaiah 61:1-3; Zechariah 9:11, 12).

The word repentance basically means “reversal”. And the gospel we preach proclaims a complete reversal. The repentance accomplished for us, the repentance we proclaim in the gospel is a reversal of all things for us by Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). The repentance God commands of sinners is a reversal of our thoughts, minds, and attitudes about how sins are remitted.

This proclamation of reversal is the blessed proclamation of the remission of sins. Everything has been reversed for us, because he has put away (remitted) our sins. His prisoners are
sent forth out of their prison, because he has remitted their sins. “And ye”, you who have been turned to him by hearing him declare that he has put away your sins, “are witnesses of these things” (v. 48). Every redeemed sinner is, in his place, Christ’s missionary, his witness, bearing his own testimony to his Saviour’s accomplishments, his grace, and the free forgiveness of sins found in him.

Our Saviour commanded his disciples to preach the gospel everywhere, to all men, among all nations; and he said, “beginning at Jerusalem”. Robert Hawker wrote …

“Those Jerusalem-sinners, whose hearts were to be called by sovereign grace on the then approaching day of Pentecost, were there; many of whom had joined the Scribes and Elders in his crucifixion, and were now triumphing in having shed his blood. Yet, to this Jerusalem, this slaughter-house of his Prophets, and himself also, Jesus will have the first proclamation of mercy in his death made! Oh! the riches of his grace! Oh! the boundless love of Christ, which passeth knowledge”!

None are beyond the reach of grace. None are beyond the reach of omnipotent mercy. It is the glory of our Great Physician that he heals incurable cases. The things that are impossible to men are possible with Christ.

Glorious End

In verses 50-53 Luke gives us a very brief description of our Saviour’s glorious end.

“And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.”

Here, Luke takes one giant step, moving from the Lord’s resurrection to his ascension forty days later. Here he shows us
in simple language the blessed, triumphant climax of our Redeemer’s work on this earth. Our risen Christ is the same in his resurrection glory as he has ever been (John 17:5).

“He lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them.” He left them when in the very act of blessing them. The high priest in the Old Testament typified Christ in the lifting up of his hands to bless the people. He, however, prayed for the blessing of God upon his people. The Lord Jesus commands it. Our great High Priest ascended while blessing, as if to say that his blessing is forever. As with Manoah, he ascended in the sweet incense of his own sacrifice (Judges 13:19, 20).

The Lord Jesus was carried up to heaven, upon the merit of his own blood and righteousness as the Lamb of God slain for our sins, and accepted as our Forerunner to be the Anchor of our souls, to be our Advocate with the Father, and to assure us of our indestructible, everlasting salvation, security, and blessedness (Romans 8:31-39).

When they saw him ascend, after hearing his words and receiving his blessing (his perpetual, unceasing, everlasting blessing), the redeemed of the Lord worshipped him and went away with great joy, because he had “opened their understanding”. Oh, may he do the same for you and me continually! If he will give us a conscious interest in his salvation, causing us to hear the word of the truth of the gospel of our salvation, we will worship him with great joy and put our own “Amen” to his blessed name and work.

**Coming Again**

“And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 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”
(Acts 1:10, 11).

The day will soon come when this same Jesus shall return from heaven in like manner as he ascended. He will come forth, like the Jewish high priest of old, to bless his people, to gather his saints together, and to restore all things (Leviticus 9:23; Acts 3:21). For that day, let us wait, “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.” Until that day, let us love and adore him, trust and serve him as his “witnesses of these things” to the praise of his glory.
Chapter 63

“And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:50-53).

His Nail Pierced Hands

Once every year, on the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament, the high priest would lay aside his glorious apparel and put on a common white robe and linen trousers, identifying himself with the common people. He would take the lamb appointed for sacrifice and slay it. He would go alone into the holy of holies with the blood of the lamb. There he would sprinkle the sacrificial blood upon the mercy-seat, which covered the ark of the covenant.

That atoning sacrifice God required once every year for propitiation, so that the sins of the nation might be covered. Then, the high priest would put on his gorgeous garments again, the robes of fine linen, scarlet, and blue, with the sweet-sounding bells and pomegranates. He would put on his glittering breastplate and place the mitre on his head.

He would come out in that gorgeous apparel as God’s high priest, lift up his hands, and bless the people of God in words like these “The Lord bless thee and keep thee: the Lord make his
face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

**Type Fulfilled**
That elaborate ceremony was ordained of God to typify the work of Christ, that One who was to come who would be both the true Sacrifice and the true High Priest over the household of faith. We see that type beautifully fulfilled in Luke 24:50-53.

Here we see the Lord Jesus Christ lifting up his hands as our glorious High Priest and blessing his people. Our Saviour had for a while laid aside his robe of glory and splendour, and veiled himself in human flesh. He offered himself, body, soul, and spirit, as a propitiatory, sin-atoning sacrifice to God. “By his own blood he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:12). And now our great High Priest, just as he was ascending into heaven, lifted up his hands to bless his people. “And he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.” Let us now, as we conclude our study of Luke’s Gospel, focus our minds and our hearts on his nail pierced hands.

Having spoiled the grave, our Lord proved his power over things that are under the earth. Tarrying for forty days among men after his resurrection, he claimed his power over the earth itself. Then he ascended up through the air to show that the dominion of the prince of the power of the air was broken. Finally, the Son of God entered again into the heaven of heavens, claiming his throne of total and universal sovereignty as our blessed God-man Mediator. From the lowest depths of the grave to the highest realms of glory, Jesus Christ reigns supreme over the vast domains, King of kings and Lord of lords.

**His Reasons**
Our Lord Jesus might have gone straight to heaven on the
morning of his resurrection; but he had reasons for tarrying on the earth for forty days. I want to briefly point out some of the reasons why our Lord remained here for forty days after his resurrection. In the days of Noah the waters of God’s judgment overflowed the earth for forty days. Our Saviour was in the wilderness for forty days, where he was tempted of the devil. And now the victorious Christ tarries for forty days of triumph in the very place where he had fought the battle and won the victory. But why did he tarry here for those forty days?

Those forty days were sufficient to prove to all mankind that he had truly risen from the dead. He came forth from the grave, not as some sort of phantom or ghost, but as a real man of flesh and bones. During this time, our Lord removed every lingering doubt from the minds of his disciples. He said, “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” (v. 39). Again, he tarried here those forty days, because those instructions he had given to his disciples before his death needed a few finishing touches. He had yet many things to tell them, which they could not have understood before his death and resurrection. But, primarily, our Lord Jesus tarried here for forty days so that he might issue the commission his church must follow so long as the world stands.

He said to Peter, “Feed my sheep … Feed my lambs.” He commanded them all saying, “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned.” He would not make his departure from the world until his final orders had been given. The mighty Captain of our salvation marshalled his troops, set them in their ranks, and gave them their marching orders. He commanded them to march forward into battle, and onward to victory, with this word of promise “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Then, just as he was leaving his troops upon the earth, and
going up to assume his throne, “he lifted up his hands and blessed them.” Can you picture the scene? There is the Son of God with his apostles and disciples gathered around him. They have come out of Jerusalem to the Mount Olivet. Behind them was Jerusalem, the city left desolate and awaiting destruction, and the place called Calvary, where forty-three days earlier he had suffered, bled, and died as our Substitute. Just ahead were Bethany, the little village where he had performed the mighty miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead, and the home into which he had been so often received as a welcome Guest, the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. And just below them was the Garden of Gethsemane, where for our sakes he had wrestled with death and hell, sweating blood.

We are not told all that took place that day; but it seems reasonable to me to suppose that our Lord must have sung a hymn with his beloved disciples. I imagine that there were some final, personal words to each of the disciples. He must have assured Peter, comforted James, inspired John, and encouraged Thomas. At any rate, he gave them his farewell message. Then, “he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.”

While he was blessing them, he broke the law of gravity and began to rise. The disciples must have been astonished. He began to rise up to heaven, slowly, majestically, until he was almost out of sight. Then, the astonished disciples saw a cloud between them and their Saviour, and the Lord’s body was gone. “A cloud received him out of their sight.” Who knows what happened beyond that cloud? It was too glorious for human eyes to see, or for human ears to hear. But I think the angels of God must have begun to sing, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in”! One cried, “Who is the King of glory?” Another replied, “The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle … The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.” And now the ascended Christ sits as a King and a Priest upon his throne.
Lifted To Bless

As he ascended, “he lifted up his hands and blessed them.” The hands of our Lord were lifted up to bless. Every blessing of divine grace flows to us freely from the nail pierced hands of the Son of God. Standing there upon the Mount of Olives, anticipating that glory which lay immediately before him, our Lord Jesus wanted to bless his disciples. He had opened his ministry with a proclamation of grace; and now his last act upon the earth is a benediction of grace.

These uplifted hands are the hands of our Lord and Redeemer. He said to his troubled, fearful disciples, “Behold my hands.” When he had “showed them his hands”, their hearts were comforted and filled with joy. These are the hands of our sovereign Creator, our eternal Surety, and our blessed Saviour. These hands blessed the little children, stilled the tempest, saved perishing Peter, and raised the widow’s son. These hands assured doubting Thomas and comforted the troubled disciples.

Are you in need? Are you in trouble? Is your heart anxious, burdened, and pressed down with care? Your Saviour says, “Behold my hands”! His hands are lifted up to bless.

This blessing was not at all unusual. The hands of our Lord were always blessing hands. Throughout his earthly life, blessings flowed from them continually. During his earthly ministry, thousands received multiplied blessings from his hands. The four gospels are full of examples of blessings, which fell from the hands of Christ. He went about doing good. His hands scattered blessings like a farmer scatters his seed.

When our Lord lifted up his hands to bless his disciples, as he was leaving them, he was just doing what he had always done. The richest blessings we ever get from the hands of Christ are not unusual things at all, but just a continuation of his old ways. If this day the Son of God lifts up his hands to bless you, it will only be another link in the golden chain of his mercy. He
But now Christ blessed his disciples in a somewhat different manner. He blessed them with a new authority. Before he had prayed for blessings upon them. Now he pronounces the blessing! His work of sacrifice was done. The atonement was complete. And the blessings had been purchased. Before our Saviour had looked up to heaven and asked for the blessings. Now, he looks down, as it were, from heaven and bestows the blessing, as one whose right and power it is to bless.

No one except the Lord Jesus Christ has the right, authority, and power to bless us. All who pretend to be priests (or priestly preachers) with power to bless are deceivers of men’s souls. As our Saviour lifts up his hands, he seems to be saying, “Look here, my children, all blessings are in these hands.” These are the hands of our Daysman, the God-man Mediator.

Another thing that strikes me is the fact that the blessing of our Lord’s hands was a full and complete blessing. Did you notice what our Saviour said as he blessed them? Luke does not tell us that he said a word. He seems to have simply “looked” the blessing upon them. I can almost picture him. He stretched his arms upward and opened his hands wide, and waved them over the people. In that gesture he seems to be saying, “Look, my ransomed flock, all that I have is for you. All is yours. All that you need now, and all that you ever shall need is in these hands.”

Once more, the blessing of our Lord’s hands was a special, peculiar blessing. “He lifted up his hands and blessed them.” This was a special, distinguishing blessing. It was not for the world, but for his own people. The teaching of “common grace” is a common delusion. The blessings of God’s grace and goodness are special, family blessings reserved for the Lord’s chosen. Yes, our God and Saviour sends the sunshine and the rain upon the reprobate, and they receive the temporal benefit of
such; but even the sunshine and the rain descend upon the earth for God’s elect. The blessings of God are for his own (Romans 8:28). Those things that men refer to as the blessings of “common grace” will only add to the condemnation of the wicked. God’s elect are blessed in all things (Deuteronomy 28:1-14); but the wicked and unbelieving are cursed in all things (Deuteronomy 28:15-46). Let all men know that in all things, “the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel” (Exodus 11:7). In all things he is particularly and distinguishingly gracious to his own elect. Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. He laid down his life for his sheep. Here he blessed his redeemed ones. He could not and would not withhold one blessing from those for whom he had poured out his life’s blood. As our High Priest, he had been discriminating in his prayer; and he is discriminating in his blessing (John 17:9, 20).

Are we now blessed in Christ? If so, it is because we always were blessed in him (Ephesians 1:3-14). And we shall yet be blessed by those dear hands. There is no power in heaven, in earth, or in hell which can reverse the blessings of our Lord. He who has ascended up to heaven left us a legacy of blessings from his hands. His hands will bless us while we live, bless us when we die, and will bless us in the judgment. His hands shall wave away his enemies into everlasting fire. And his hands will beckon us to glory, saying, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Christ lifted up his hands to bless us, and we are blessed indeed!

**Nail Pierced Hands**

Look again at those hands of our Lord by which we are blessed. They are nail pierced hands. Can you, with your mind’s eye, see him rising up into heaven? I do not know what the disciples saw last. Probably each one saw some distinguishing feature in the
glorified Christ which they best remembered. But I am sure that they all beheld those distinguishing marks in his hands. Those hands bore the marks of the Crucified One. We cannot mistake him. This is the One who was nailed to the tree for us. What do these nail pierced hands tell us?

Those nail pierced hands identify our Lord. They tell us who he is. As the disciples beheld those blessed hands, with the nail holes still in them, they knew that it was indeed their Lord. And, when we see our Redeemer in glory, we shall know him by the prints of the nails in his hands. Yes, even in glory, our Lord bears the marks of his crucifixion. He appears in glory as “a Lamb that had been slain.” These are the hands that loose the seals and open the book of God’s decrees (Revelation 5:5), and fulfill all that is written in the book (Revelation 10:1-3).

For another thing, those nail pierced hands show us plainly the price of that blessing which Christ bestows. They tell us what he has done. Oh, he blesses us freely and bountifully; but who can tell what those blessings of grace have cost him?

There’s ne’er a gift his hand bestows,
But cost his heart a groan!

Yes, we are freely blessed; but every blessing we enjoy so freely is given to us by the nail pierced hands of our Redeemer. Had he not been nailed to that tree to die in our place, we could never have been saved. “The chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.” We get everything through those nail pierced hands of our Lord. Righteousness is in those pierced hands. Redemption is in those pierced hands. Pardon is in those pierced hands. Peace is in those pierced hands.

With the touch of his nail pierced hand, the Son of God heals the sin-sick soul. Sinners cannot get any good thing, except
through those nail pierced hands. These hands are the ladder which Jacob saw reaching from earth to heaven and from heaven to earth. Those nail pierced hands hold the keys of life. Those nail pierced hands open the gates of heaven. Those nail pierced hands are the only Refuge for our souls.

It is a great blessing just to look at those nail pierced hands. We would care nothing about merely seeing those hands with the mortal eye of this flesh out of curiosity. But, oh, what a blessing it is to look upon the nail pierced hands of our Redeemer with the eye of faith! Looking upon those nail pierced hands we are made to weep and mourn because of our sin. It was our sin that pierced him. Beholding his nail pierced hands we know that he has carried away all our sins, that he finished our salvation, and that we “shall never perish”.

By lifting up those nail pierced hands to bless his disciples, our Lord Jesus epitomized the gospel. Those hands were pierced in crucifixion so that they might be lifted up in salvation. There is the sinner’s Substitute going up to heaven with those nail pierced hands; and as he goes he scatters the blessing of grace upon us. The blessings of salvation could not be ours in any other way than through the nail pierced hands of our Substitute. Fall down before him and ask him to stretch over you those nail pierced hands.

**Sovereign’s Hands**

The nail pierced hands of our Lord Jesus Christ now hold the sceptre of total and sovereign dominion. They are the hands of him who alone is the Sovereign of the universe. We look back to Calvary and see those hands pierced in our redemption. We look back at Mount Olivet and see those nail pierced hands lifted up to bless us. Now, we look up to heaven and see those nail pierced hands, which bless us, are also ruling the world for us (John 17:1, 2; Psalm 68:17, 18; Romans 14:9).

The nail pierced hands of our Christ hold the sceptre of
universal providence. “All things were made by him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16, 17). All men are in his hands. All the demons of hell are in his hands. All events are in his hands.

He’s got the whole world in his hands,
He’s got the whole wide world in his hands!

King Jesus has power and control over all things, so that he might give eternal life to all those for whom his hands were pierced. Those nail pierced hands, which bless us, rule all things for the church he redeemed with his own precious blood (Revelation 1:16; Ephesians 1:19-23). Our Lord says, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” And in those nail-prints the Son of God reads all the names of all his people. Those hands protect us. Those hands provide for us. Those hands preserve us. Those hands will present us faultless, unblameable, and unreproveable before the presence of his glory in heaven.

In the resurrection morning we shall see the nail pierced hands of our Redeemer. What a glorious sight that will be! When Rachel held Jacob’s hands, they must have appeared most precious to her. They bore the marks of his fourteen years of loving toil for her. And when we see the nail-prints in the hands of our Redeemer, we shall see the marks of his loving toil by which he redeemed us.

The nail pierced hands of our Lord Jesus Christ hold the sceptre of righteous judgment, too. Those hands will slay all his enemies. And those hands will be held up as our only plea and our only defence in that great day. Have you seen Christ? Have you seen those hands pierced to redeem, lifted up to bless, exalted to save? “Him hath God exalted with his own right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and
the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). Those nail pierced hands are able to save. They are full of forgiveness. Those nail pierced hands should compel us to worship him. They should cause us to consecrate ourselves to the glory of our Saviour. Those nail pierced hands should fill us with comfort and joy. They should inspire us with patience. Those blessed hands, those nail pierced hands will accomplish God’s eternal purpose in all things. “The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands.” May it please the Lord now to lift up his nail pierced hands to bless you, today, tomorrow and forever.

Amen.